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Under Which King?

A NOVEL.

By COMPTON READE.

17 TO 27 VANDEWATER ST
NEW YORK
George Munro
PUBLISHER

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A NOVEL

BY COMPTON READE.

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UNDER WHICH KING?

PROLOGUE.

"GOOD-MORNING, Hodge. Hope your wife and the boy are doing well, Hodge. Quite well, eh? That's right. Singular thing, isn't it, Hodge, that you and I should be blessed with a son and heir each on the self-same day? Odd coincidence, Hodge, very. One of those accidents, Hodge, that seem to be done on purpose."

John Hodge, a fine, straight-limbed specimen of the Kentish breed, stared hard at this rather jerky harangue, and responded briefly, "Ay, ay, Sir Robert!" adding, perhaps for civility's sake, "and my lady—I hope she's as hearty as my missus is?"

"Thanks, Hodge, much," said Sir Robert Marmyon. "I am glad to believe that you, in common with all the laborers on my estate, take as warm a personal interest in all that concerns my happiness as I do in yours. My wife is, as you may imagine, rather a cause of anxiety at this crisis. People in her rank of life, Hodge, have not enjoyed the inestimable advantage of a robust training, and I fear that, unlike your good wife (who has been gifted by Providence not only with beauty, but with adequate physical strength), she will hardly be equal to the duties of a mother—do you follow me, Hodge?—of a *mother* to our boy."

"Bad job that, for the child," remarked Hodge, sententiously. "I'm not one of those, Sir Robert, that believes in a cow being better than a woman, except 'tis for calves."

"There," interposed the baronet, "I venture to differ from you, Hodge. Sir Marshall Midwinter, who, as you may be aware, is the queen's doctor, and who is now in attendance on Lady Marmyon, said to me only yesterday: 'My dear Marmyon, a cow is a first-rate nurse to the children of what is termed the working-class of people, that is to say, whose industry lies in the direction of manual rather than of mental labor. To those of your order it is quite different. A working-man's child, assuming the mother to be healthy, is born with a constitution and with ready-made muscles. Your child, on the contrary, inherits with constitutional delicacy a superfluity of nerves and an absence of muscular development. In the one case the cow is as good, or perhaps even better than mother's milk; in the other, nourishment from the human breast is desirable, perhaps essential.' Do you quite follow Sir Marshall's argument, Hodge?"

Hodge shook his head as one not to be convinced by sophistry.

"My good man, it's as plain as a pikestaff," persisted Sir Robert, with singular vehemence. "You are the cart-horse, and a very useful and honorable part, too, the cart-horse plays in the mechanism of the world. I am the race-horse. I am, let it be granted, of less

service to my species, yet, perhaps, of some small value in my way to that portion of it called Society. Now, your boy being, luckily for him, constituted by nature of a rough and tough fiber, could thrive on—well—pretty nearly anything in the shape of lacteal fluid, whereas mine, poor little brat, stands in urgent need of the strongest and most stimulating milk. And the hard part of the business is, that his mother, the most fragile of mortals, has nothing to give him. Now, Hodge, I hope you understand me—let me say rather that we thoroughly understand each other?"

Sir Robert Marmyon, Hodge's liege lord, had condescended for the first time for many years to enter his humble domicile, and the latter, to be candid, was rather puzzled at the outset to guess what was the cause of this abnormal visitation. Little by little the squire's words, no less than his manner, began to convey his meaning. The revelation could not have been altogether quite pleasant to the blunt intelligence of the laborer, for he answered in a tone that could bear but one interpretation.

"Whatever you're a-driving at, Sir Robert, hadn't you better speak your mind straight? I'm a plain man, and used to plain words."

Sir Robert Marmyon drew himself up rather superbly. Not being accustomed to brook opposition, he was quick to scent it in anticipation. Consequently his tone changed at once from that of cajolery to one of command.

"Hodge," he said, "I will meet your challenge, but in doing so I would remind you that your family have been for many generations nursed by our estate. Only last week I was looking over the list of names of the troopers who followed my ancestor, Sir Leoline Marmyon, to Edgehill and Naseby in the service of the king, and I found among the number that of Hodge—your ancestor, I have no doubt. And your grandfather was, within my personal recollection, my grandfather's keeper; your father my father's groom, while your elder brother is my keeper. We Marmyons, my good Hodge, have been for centuries the friends of your family; and it is as your friend, as well as your landlord, that I come this morning to proffer a request which ought not to be—I may hope, too, will not be—refused."

Hodge's bright Saxon eye sparkled like a sapphire in the sun as it gazed straight at the quick, clever brown eye of his lord, which, however, seemed rather to avoid its telling luminance. Then he made answer firmly and crisply,

"Sir Robert, you want me to sell the mother's milk that is the birthright of my baby? Is that it?"

"We won't talk, in a matter of this sort, about selling or buying, if you please," rejoined the baronet, resuming his cajoling manner. "That is a very unfair way of putting a very reasonable request. I come to you and say, Hodge, there are more causes than one which impel me to ask that as a favor which I might almost—having regard to our mutual positions—enforce as a demand. I have told you briefly some of these causes; I will add but one more—our babe is, as you know, the heir of my name and estate. Can you wonder that I should be solicitous concerning one who may—probably will—stand in my shoes?"

"Well, no, Sir Robert. But can you wonder at my safeguarding my little 'un's food? 'Tain't mine to sell."

"Tush!" cried the baronet, testily stamping his foot. "Why do you persist in using that ugly word 'sell'?"

"Because it's the straight one," smiled Hodge, proudly.

"Then I am to understand you decline my suggestion, without so much as considering it, without referring it to your wife, who is at least as closely interested as yourself, for her approval?"—this with consummate hauteur.

"That's it, Sir Robert."

"Then, Hodge, you compel me to own that I have been deceived in you! I am disappointed and annoyed. No—nothing further, if you please. You have given your answer, and I shall take my own course."

The star-like eyes of Hodge fully appreciated the precise meaning of these last words. They meant mischief—tyranny.

"Sir Robert," he remarked, quietly, as the great man moved toward the threshold—he had been standing with his hands in the pockets of his shooting-coat on the cottage floor—"you are hard. You take our lives; you take our labor from sunrise to sunset. In return you give as little as you can in wages, and make it up somehow in gifts that degrade us. Not content with that, you want to separate our wives from our children, and you demand as your rightful perquisite the breast of the mother, as though it were the breast of one of your brood mares or St. Bernard dogs."

"It's a lie," gasped Sir Robert, turning positively livid with rage at this insolence, as he considered it, "I did not demand, I asked; and I was a fool for my pains."

"A demand that is followed by a threat is not much of a favor," replied Hodge. "But that don't signify, Sir Robert, one way or the other. What makes the blood boil in my veins is that you, knowing me from my boyhood, should believe me capable of being bribed to starve the son of my body. Do you take me for a low thief, that you expect me to rob a baby fresh from its mother's womb, and that mother my wife?"

"I take you," said Sir Robert, "for nothing worse than a pig-headed, conceited, ungrateful rascal. You are standing in your own light and in your child's light. The fact is you've been reading some infernal radical paper, and have got your head stuffed with all sorts of silly sentimentality. Well, my man, take your own course, and, as I have already said, I intend to take mine. Good-day, Hodge."

But the tall, handsome laborer vouchsafed no counter-valediction of the hypocritical sort, and as his feudal lord departed double quick, he watched his retreating form through the village of Marmyon with eyes expressive of defiance and distrust, and a sneer on his lips of scorn rather than wrath.

"What made him come here slavering me?" he soliloquized, angrily. "If he'd tackled me like a man, I'd have had more trouble to refuse him; but to talk about being friends! A friend who gives you eighteen shillings a week for seventy-two hours' labor, and then docks you off two shillings for house-rent! If that's friendship, I'd as lieve have his enmity. Anyhow, he don't come lord over me—

not as long as there's Australia or America to go to, and that I suppose is what it's coming to. No great harm either."

* * * * * * *

In the meanwhile, as honest Hodge stood meditating on the probable consequences of his recusance, Sir Robert Marmyon strode vigorously forward through the village, where every cap was lifted in obeisance, through the avenue of wych-elms, and so to Marmyon Court. His temper resembled powerfully that of King Ahab when that Radical commoner Naboth declined to sell his ancestral vineyard at any price. It was that of a thwarted, spoiled child of fortune, who desired to wreak his vengeance on something or somebody.

And yet this man's glorious inheritance, coupled with a large command of money, and a social position superior to that of half the royal personages of Europe, ought to have rendered him magnanimous. Marmyon Court may not have possessed the barbaric splendor of the palace of the jaundiced King of Israel, but it could only be termed a noble pile. Its gray gables flanked the side of the range of chalk hills, and its corridors, chambers, and staircases told of a past when gentry of the Marmyon type were more of autocrats than at present, yet not one-half so luxurious. The browsing deer among the proud ancestral trees—"so great and good," as the poet rightly terms them—augmented the lordliness of this feudal demesne. Surely baseness, meanness, littleness, ought to have been absent far from the mind of its fortunate owner! Surely, if anything sublunary could inspire a small intelligence or an attenuated heart with a sense of generosity, it would be so venerable and beautiful a heritage as this same Marmyon! Surely so, for is not the unvarying rule of chivalry *noblesse oblige?* And yet, what was the fact? Here was this superb and supreme suzerain ready to trample on a poor man for the heinous offense of honor and independence, though all the while, as a mere matter of abstract morality, the serf was right and his lord wrong; the man was the Bayard, the *preux chevalier*, and the master nothing loftier than a poor, petty, peevish bully, whose grandeur had obliterated his conscience.

As Sir Robert was hurrying to his wife's bedchamber, in a terrible haste, who should he meet but Nurse Pratling, with the babe in her matronly arms.

"This fellow," he jerked out, with savage emphasis—"this fellow Hodge, Mrs. Pratling, has the audacity to refuse to allow his wife to nurse baby. I call it disgusting and disgraceful conduct on his part, but just like the working-classes. Most ungrateful pack of curs in the world. Catch me doing anything for any of them in future. No, no, Mrs. Pratling, a burned child dreads the fire. This is the first favor—the very first—I have asked of a living soul on my estate, and what is the reply? Simply this—'Sha'n't.' Very well, I shall keep my own counsel, and just let—"

"There, there, Sir Robert," interupted Nurse Pratling, with that sweet smile which the doctors were wont to declare was more valuable than champagne itself to her lady-patients, "look at baby! Isn't he a beauty? Hazel eyes, Sir Robert. Generally the way when the gentleman's brown and the lady blue eyes, like your dear lady's. Hush, hush, my wicksy-picksy!"

This last was addressed presumably to the heir, whose stomach being ventose and painful, caused him to give tongue—rather distressfully too; for his neck seemed puffy, if not swollen.

"Ha! yes," said the baronet, "hazel; quite so. Pretty color, hazel. But, Mrs. Pratling, what's to be done for a human cow? Our little gentleman here is getting hungry, I presume. Must we wire to London?"

Nurse Pratling shook her head. "No, don't, Sir Robert," was her rejoinder. "Leastways till I've seen Mrs. Hodge."

"Oh," retorted the baronet, huffily. "Don't flatter yourself, my good soul! You'll do no good in that quarter, I assure you. The Hodge family is too radical!"

"I may as well try," replied nurse, in a tone of quiet confidence; adding, "it won't take me a half-hour to get there and back."

"Very well," observed Sir Robert, dryly, as he turned toward Lady Marmyon's room to inquire how her ladyship felt. "Only look sharp, for I don't wish to delay my wire, or we shall not get a wet-nurse to-day."

"No more I will," was the answer. "Here, Hester," summoning an obedient Abigail, "you take baby, and mind he don't cry his little eyes out, poor dear! I'll be back, Sir Robert, in less than two jiffs."

No recognized system of chronology having as yet succeeded in quantifying one jiff, it would be difficult to determine the duration of something between one and two. Sir Robert doubtless felt that this indefinite span might last over an epoch or a century, or be reduced to a few half seconds, according to the good pleasure of Nurse Pratling, so he calmly made up his mind to wait a couple of hours, and with that intent—my lady being asleep and not requiring to be fidgeted with his small talk and fussiness—sat down to digest his "Morning Post" with all the zeal and devotion of a sincere aristocrat and earnest admirer of the British constitution in Church and State.

He had barely waded through the leading articles, and was about to regale his imagination with a description of the dresses worn at the nuptials of Lady Ermyntrude de Stigginson with Captain Raffriff, of the Mullingar Murderers, a gallant corps, wherein his father had once held a commission, when a knock at the library door announced the return of Mrs. Pratling, with the professional smile if anything rather augmented in breadth.

"Well? And what news do you bring, my good woman?"

"It's all arranged comfortable," replied the monthly nurse, with a smile of intense satisfaction. "I seed Mrs. Hodge herself, I did, Sir Robert, acause if you wants anythink done very bad you'd best try the wife. There's a proverb as says that the gray mare's the better horse of the two, and that's my motter, Sir Robert. Law bless 'ee, when Pratling were alive, d'ye think I'd have let him do as he liked with me or my baby? Not me, Sir Robert."

"Well, Mrs. Pratling?"

"Mrs. Hodge, she says, says she, if I gives up my boo-oy, she says, what will Sir Robert do for my husband, she says? So, says I, leastways I make so bold as to say, there's the Marmyon Arms public-'us. Old Jarvis is sold up, and Sir Robert hasn't got no tenant

for it. Why shouldn't he put in your man? She says, says she, do you mean it, mum? Says I, that I does, Mrs. Hodge, and I know'd Sir Robert were willing to give it to Hodge, for I 'eerd him say so. Not as I did, Sir Robert, but I did 'ear in the servants' 'all as that were in your mind. Well, Mrs. Hodge she gave a loud call for Hodge, and he came upsteers, and there were a word or two; but—there, all's well as ends well, is the beautifiest verse in the Bible; and as the song says, Sir Robert, 'Of the two ways she had his'n.' Hodge and William Benson, the gardener, with two lads, are a-going to fetch her up to the Court on a stretcher, and Widder Gipps is to have her little 'un to bring up by hand."

"Upon my honor," smiled Sir Robert, "you're a downright clever diplomatist, Nurse Pratling, and I'll endorse your protocol."

"Do what?"

"I'll give that curmudgeon, John Hodge, the Marmyon Arms."

"For a term of years," suggested Mr. Pratling; adding, "I gived the man my word as it was to be so, for he says, says he, he says, if so be as I knuckles under to Sir Robert, he says, as soon as the boo-oy's weaned, he'll go to turn me out, he says; and I says, Hodge, says I, trust me for that."

"I'll give him an agreement," replied the baronet, "though my word is enough."

"That's what Hodge said," replied Mrs. Pratling. "A man of his word, says he, is our squire, but hard."

Sir Robert smiled. This definition sounded as terse as it was, to his own knowledge, true. Like most of his order, he respected the law of honor punctiliously, but never, on any consideration, paid a pound for that which he could by force or favor obtain for nineteen shillings and sixpence.

With that Nurse Pratling bowed herself out, and in the course of the morning, that is to say by the servants' dinner-hour, her programme was so far carried into execution that Mrs. Hodge was conveyed from her cottage in the village to the Court, and also carried upstairs to the chamber assigned to the separate use of the monthly nurse. There was one awkwardness, however. Mrs. Hodge would not leave her baby to Widow Gipps. She begged to be allowed to bring it to the Court, in order to have a last kiss and last look. Mothers can not quite extirpate nature, however mercenary may be their disposition.

Mrs. Pratling shook her head when she espied Baby Hodge at his mother's breast. "You didn't oughter have brought him, mum," she pleaded. "Two good-byes is worse nor one. Hester, you go and fetch our baby. There ain't a pin to choose between 'em, though yourn, Mrs. Hodge, weighs a bit the heaviest of the two."

In a minute, Hester, a rather sawney country lass, with a very pale face, introduced Master Marmyon.

"They're an evenish pair," mused Nurse Pratling. "Both on 'em's got hazel eyes and a biggish lobe to the ear. Well, Mrs. Hodge, arter all we're much the same flesh and blood. I don't go to say there bain't no difference between a king and a coster, acause there be, but not at starting. It all comes o' the bringin' up."

But Mrs. Hodge was not much given to philosophizing. Her one idea was her boy, though she had covenanted to sell the nourishment

given him by his Creator in return for a very equivocal guerdon, one of those blessings that carry curses with them—albeit, to the rustic mind, a "pub" is an earthly paradise for the publican and his wife. It was the parting so soon after the gift had come from God that caused Mrs. Hodge to wince and her mouth to twitch, symptoms not lost upon the critical eyes of Nurse Pratling.

"Now, mum," said the clever woman, "it will never do to fret—no, never—or the milk will go wrong. Suppose you taste a bit of mutton and get down a pint or so of stout? I'm that hungry I must eat a bit myself, so I'll send it you up from the servants' 'all nice and hot, with a pertater and a Spanish onion, if that's good enough?"

"Thank you, mum," replied Mrs. Hodge, in whose eye was visible a rather big dazzling tear. "If it be all the same, I will, please."

"Bless you, you two beauties," smiled nurse, pinching gently their chubby legs. Then, as if a sudden thought flashed across her, she took a bit of golden cord out of the cupboard, tied it round Master Marmyon's little leg tight, and laid the child on the bed by the side of Mrs. Hodge, with the muttered remark, "'Twouldn't never do to mix 'em—and they're uncommon alike, they is, in their bodies. 'Tis the lace and stuff makes the difference."

This maneuver duly performed, she bade Haster follow her to the servants' hall, in order to obtain and convey to Mrs. Hodge the desiderated repast of mutton, potato, and onion, with the fortifying stout regarded as essential to the existence of maternity when on the nurse. Hester, though in expression sawney, was quick enough with her fingers and toes, or she never would have been selected for service at the Court by Mrs. Binks, the august housekeeper, a lady of much force and discrimination of character, who was the actual, while Lady Marmyon simply posed as nominal, mistress of this very extensive domestic establishment.

It took Hester perhaps five minutes—not more—to lay a tray, place neatly thereupon a plateful of steaming meat, with vegetables and stout, and carry it up to Mrs. Hodge, who lay, in accordance with nurse's orders, recumbent on Mrs. Pratling's bed, still nursing baby, but wearing a more contented expression of countenance. Perhaps, so Hester thought, it was the advent of the mutton, or perhaps anticipation of London stout.

"Here's a nice dinner for you, Mrs. Hodge," said the girl, with an affectation of cheeriness. "It must be hard to part, I know, but then 'tis for his good and your good, mum, bain't it?"

Mrs. Hodge gazed at the girl with strange earnestness. "I can't abear it, Hester," she said; "I can't eat a mouthful with that there innercent baby a-lookin' at me that reproachful. Would you mind, my dear, a-slippin' on your bonnet and a-takin' him away to Widder Gipps? I shall feel that better, Hester, when the little un's out o' my sight. You won't mind, will 'ee?" earnestly, very.

Mind! Not Hester, the most soft-souled, feeble-natured of her sex, who ran out of the room, returning in two minutes bonneted and shawled, wrapped up baby, and was off, *augen blicklicher*.

"Why, what?" cried Nurse Pratling, on reappearing well filled a few minutes later.

"Couldn't abear it," grunted Mrs. Hodge, as though nature had

been overtaxed beyond the utmost limits of endurance. "Couldn't abear the sight of that dear baby. Spoiled my appertite it did. Give I palpitations, it did, in the 'eart. So I ast Hester to take away un straight, and she's gone with the pore child to Widder Gipps. A drop more stout, please."

An expression of dubiety flitted across the face of Mrs. Pratling, and she may have had her suspicions, for instead of answering Mrs. Hodge she drew back the clothes and satisfied herself that the gold cord was still as she had tied it round baby's ankle. There it was, however, tight as wax, so she remarked that the departure of poor baby was just as well, perhaps, and was about to supply further malt liquor when a maid came running in with a message that Sir Marshall Midwinter had arrived from London by the train, and was waiting to see Lady Marmyon and the child.

In another half-second the good nurse was in the superb presence of Esculapius. They were, so to speak, old friends, for Nurse Pratling did a great business with aristocratic and wealthy patients; and he, as all the world knows, made his money and reputation by acting the part of accoucheur to that species of superbity.

"How's baby, nurse?"

"Here is the little dear, Sir Marshall," responded Mrs. Pratling, conducting the doctor into her sanctum, "and this is his nurse, with a breast of milk fit for a king."

"How do you do, ma'am?" said Sir Marshall, gravely. "And how is our little embryo baronet? Ha! so! so! He has grown amazingly since yesterday. Let me see his throat. That's right," feeling the child's neck, "the slight swelling has disappeared, quite."

"Did you remark a swelling?" asked Nurse Pratling.

"Very slight," observed the doctor. "I didn't mention it, though it struck my eye. A freak of nature, nurse. Soon over too. I thought it would be worse, and brought down some lotion, but happily there is no necessity for it. Now, shall we pay her ladyship a visit? I am more anxious on her account."

"It are odd," murmured Nurse Pratling to herself, as she followed Sir Marshall Midwinter down the corridor. "I certain sure did notice a bit of a swelling this very morning as is, but it's gone as quick as it come. What a eye them doctors has, and how they keeps their thoughts to themselves! One had need to be careful, for if you aren't they'll find it out, no fear."

"And how is my charming Lady Marmyon?" cried the doctor's voice chirpily, the deep bass of a minute ago having been metamorphosed into a silvery tenor. "A little weak, eh? Well, we must expect that. Very soon you shall have some champagne, and then we shall hear no more about weakness. Let me feel the pulse."

Lady Marmyon gave him a very white, transparent hand, with delicate rose-tipped fingers and filbert nails, the wrist penciled with fine blue veins.

"A little quick, Nurse Pratling. And what do I see, a tear in Lady Marmyon's eye? Why, what can there be to cry about? Come, come!" This in the most coaxing of tones.

"It's very silly of me," whimpered her ladyship, "very idiotic indeed, and I'm quite ashamed of myself."

"It's the baby my lady's a-fretting after," interposed Nurse Pratling, with something of asperity, as though babies were an unpardonable weakness in people of Lady Marmyon's rank and present condition.

"And very natural too," protested the doctor—"very natural, just what I should expect. But we must conquer that feeling. You will have to be separated from the little man, my dear Lady Marmyon, for two or three days; after that you shall have him with you as much as you like, but till then"—and he wagged his head as though it were a tail.

"Or else," suggested Nurse Pratling, with menacing incisiveness, "my lady may expect the puerperatical fever."

"But," pleaded my lady, peevishly, "I want baby now! Perhaps in two or three days I sha'n't care to see him at all."

"Tut, tut!" cried Sir Marshall, "do be a sensible woman. There is only one course, and one too that you *must* follow. As for fretfulness or impatience, it won't do one little bit. Nurse very wisely says, 'you'll worry yourself quite ill.' As it is there's a little more pulse than I like, so please keep very quiet, will you, and—"

"I'm sure, doctor, Lady Marmyon will be most obedient," observed Sir Robert, who had just entered the room with the stealthy tread of a tame tomcat.

"I will indeed, Robert," faltered my lady submissively. "It is, I know, most foolish and suicidal to worry, and I won't worry—that is if I can help it."

And so they all laughed low in chorus, and Sir Marshall Midwinter hurried away to town as quick as the train could carry him, having netted the trifling sum of thirty guineas by this brief visit, while Nurse Pratling returned to Mrs. Hodge, who was nursing baby in right motherly style.

"Now, mum," remarked that judicious woman, "I hopes, I does, that we sha'n't have no worrits with you along of that there baby of yours as is well provided for. I heared Sir Robert give orders that the milk of my lady's favorite Alderney cow is to be reserved for him, and to be sent reg'lar twice every day to Widow Gipps, and I'll promise you my sacred word that if there's anything goes wrong you sha'n't be kept in the dark. But, if you please, no worrits, no bother! One lot of worrits is quite enough at a time, and it will take me all I know to keep my lady from messing herself into what ye may call, Mrs. Hodge, the puerperaticals. See?"

"I'll try not to fret," replied Mrs. Hodge, a fine, cherry-colored young woman, with a merry eye that seemed to give the lie then and there to the sigh she heaved rather histrionically.

"That's it," snapped Mrs. Pratling; "and none of that there sighin', if you please, mum. It's bad for the milk, mum, and you recollect, please, as your milk's a valyable article just now. Tain't every baby in this land as is born with a baronet's what's-his-name in his blessed mouth and the title-deeds of a Garden of Eden sticking to his ribs. Bl—less 'is little 'eart!"

"I know that," protested Mrs. Hodge, adding, *sotto voce*, "and I do mean to do the right thing by baby, don't I, my sweet boy?" Whereupon she ratified this promise by such a kiss as sounded, at all events, like sincerity.

"And now," whispered Nurse Pratling, "just for one nip of something comforting, and I must go and play watch-dog to my lady. Have a drop? Perhaps you'd better not. Bad for the milk. You can have your stout when you want it. You've only to ring for Hester, and she'll fetch it. I've give my orders to that effect."

Wherewith Mrs. Pratling, having gulped down a something nocuous from the mouth of a black bottle concealed in the linen-drawer, smirked herself out of the room in the best of tempers.

Lady Marmyon did not not keep her pledge to her husband and Sir Marshall Midwinter, but persisted most irrationally in fretting and fuming till her pulse began to gallop, and those fine blue veins in her wrist to show rather alarmingly. The result was that Nurse Pratling got no sleep, and convinced herself that my lady was within measurable distance of what she termed puerperatical fever—as indeed was the case, assuming that good soul meant puerperal.

Thus it happened that nurse enjoying what she styled appropriately a high old time with my lady, Mrs. Hodge was relegated to the joint company of baby and Hester; for one of the regulations briefly enforced by Sir Robert in an interview he had with John Hodge, was that he was on no account to come to the court without special permission, and this the said John, being independent enough, was decidedly averse to asking.

For some inscrutable reason, Hester took a great fancy to Mrs. Hodge. Perhaps it was because she was pretty; perhaps because, being almost her own age, there was a sort of freemasonry between them. Anyhow, she seemed determined to make friends, and Mrs. Hodge found her far too useful to chill these advances in the direction of familiarity.

And so it chanced that the following evening, with the amiable design of currying favor, Hester ran down to the village, and called at Widow Gipps's cottage for a half-hour's gossip. She had reckoned upon securing the eternal gratitude of Mrs. Hodge by bringing back a full and particular account of baby—the poor little cow's-milk-fed baby—his works and ways.

To her intense astonishment she encountered in the widow's cottage no less a person than John Hodge, who seemed to be in a terrible bate; indeed, to have put on the demon.

"How's the brat?" he grunted, angrily, in response to her query. "Don't look up to much. Gone down half his weight in the last twenty-four hours. 'Tain't right of my wife to rob the little one of his food. Why, ain't he as good as that there cussed spawn of that there shadder of a young woman, my Lady Marmyon? What's the good of shadders bringing substances into this yere wicked world, if so be as they can't feed 'em theirselves? Well, Miss Hester, and how be you, and how's my Martha? Forgotten her own flesh and blood, I'll be bound!"

"Mr. Hodge," retorted Hester, loftily, "I'm ashamed of you. Why, d'ye suppose, I've been sent here this very night as is, if it ain't to ask after baby? For shame!"

"To ask after baby!" he echoed. "Well, young woman, don't go for to ask. Look! The poor little beggar can't swaller with that there lump in his blessed throat."

"Oh, yes he can," rapped out sharply the tongue of Widow

Gipps. "He's all right, bless yer. I'll guarantee him to be the fattest of the two this day fortnight."

"What makes 'im gulp his victuals, then, as though he'd gone and got a happle or a horange in his throat?" grumbled Hodge, whose temper was simply implacable just now, in a measure, be it confessed, beecause there was no Mrs. Martha *chez lui* to cook his supper and welcome him home, nobody to sew a button on his shirt or even to make his bed. The sudden elimination of the sponsorial element from his humble domicile had very largely diminished his creature comforts, and might alone account for some cerebral irritability.

"That," said Widow Gipps, with profound emphasis, "is the bottle."

"Well," fumed Hodge, "I'll say this, Mrs. Gipps, and I hope Miss Hester will repeat it to my wife, for she ought to know it. I won't be beat by the squire—leastways if I can help it. He came and asked me—I says 'No.' Then he goes and sends down that there grinning London woman, Pratling, and she gets round my wife double-quick, and the pair of 'em is too much for me. It were my wish, it were, to do justly by our boy, come what may, and I'd have gone to Australia sooner than he should be where he is, and his mother a-giving her breast to that kid of Sir Robert's. But there, it warn't to be. We working-men, I say, would be masters instead of slaves if it weren't for the women."

"Don't you speak against the women in my presence!" said Miss Hester, bridling perkily.

"Not me, gal. The worst I'd say of you is that you make too good servants. But I weren't a-talkin' to you. What I've to say is to Widder Gipps. Look you here, old woman, I wun't be beat! Squire's taken away my boy's mother, but for all that he sha'n't have the boy's life if I can help it. He's got money, and when he wants to gain his end is as free with it as he's stingy at other times. You work for him, and you may starve on a pittance. You sell your wife, and—"

"That's temper, Hodge," here interrupted Widow Gipps. "Why don't you come to the point instead of beatin' about the bush?"

"So will I, mum. The squire's to give twenty pounds in cash for the job, besides weekly wage and keep to my wife, and the license of the Marmyon Arms from Michaelmas next at the rent old Jarvis's paid. Now, mum, that twenty shiners was a sop to me, d'ye see, to shut my blessed mouth and stop my cheek, for I were a bit outspoken to Sir Robert when he tried to come Emperor of all the Roosias over me. Twenty sovereigns, d'ye see, Mrs. Gipps. Twenty golden sovereigns, mum! They'll be mine as soon as the job's done, and I'll hand 'em over to you—yes, to you, Mrs. Gipps—if that there baby of ourn at the end of that time is alive and strong and as fit as the t'other one, as is purloining his subsistence just as his father purloins the poor man's time and toil, and gives him back, no, not half it's valley."

Hester burst out laughing. Mrs. Gipps looked puzzled, not believing in her heart that Hodge meant his words, but regarding him as beside himself with pique and indignation.

"What a silly you are!" said the girl. "I sha'n't tell your wife all that. Why, it would upset her horrible!"

"And about that there twenty pounds," chimed in skeptical Widow Gipps, "don't you bother yer 'ed, John Hodge. I don't want yer money. Not me. Keep it in your pocket, man."

"You don't! You won't?" shouted John. "Then you're in the pay of the squire. They'll make it worth your while, they will, to—"

"Hush!" cried Hester. "I know the Court better than you. That is most unjust. Besides it's ridic'lous."

"Don't talk to me, young woman," shouted John Hodge, who was waxing insensate in his wrath. "I won't betray my own flesh and blood. I won't sell my first-born, though my wife may. One of two things, Mrs. Gipps. Either you agree to my terms and save that babe's poor life, or I'll go straight to the Court and bear away my wife whether she likes it or not."

"Tut, tut!" protested Widow Gipps, "what thoughts you have been a-harboring in that there stupid head of yours, John Hodge! Who was it proposed to give the child to me? Why, your wife, not Sir Robert. And why did she propose it? Because she trusts me, and trust she may, and never repent thereof. If it will make your mind easier, John, I'll bargain to take your twenty sovereigns, but I don't require no bribes to cause me to do my duty. I've brought up six of my own, two on 'em on the bottle, so I ought to know, oughtn't I, John? Oh, you great chuckle-headed, ill-tempered feller—to think I'd hurt a hair of that blessed child's head!"

"You ought to ask Mrs. Gipps's humble parding," laughed Hester, affectedly.

John Hodge shrugged his shoulders. He was out-logiced, but not quite convinced.

"And what's more," continued Widow Gipps, "Sir Robert ain't the bad man you make out. He's give up his best cow for the boy, and he sent word to me that he begged I'd be very careful about the child; for he said, says he to William, who brought the message, he says—'I'd never forgive myself if anything happened to that there little baby,' he says."

John Hodge snorted, but still remained dumb.

"And if you'll believe me," added Hester, loftily, "Sir Robert is not the gentleman to forget the sacrifice you've made, Hodge, for him, nor to think the worse of your objectin' to make that sacrifice."

That was a very diplomatic speech of Miss Hester, but it was one of those shots that being aimed at the gold fly wild.

"Ah, well," muttered John Hodge, cynically, "I see how the land lies. There are some people who paint the devil black, and others who paint him white. You two are trying to whitewash a man who wants it bad, simply because he's a fine gentleman, with manners and money, and all that. You won't convince me he's white; that I'll tell you straight. But I own this to you—I see, from what you say, that I'm partly wrong in my calculation, and that the squire he do wish the kid to live. 'Twould be a scandal if it died, and he's one who thinks a deal of his own repitation. Yes,

you've made that clear to my mind, and you may tell Martha if you will, Hester, that I'm content, as far as I can be. Good-night."

"Hie!" cried Widow Gipps after him, with a laugh of some significance, "does the twenty sovereigns stand as a bargain, John?"

"That it do," was the firm reply.

And so Miss Hester, who had been already absent too long, kissed poor baby, and hurried back to rich baby and his nurse, who was performing her maternal function, all smiles and contentment.

"Well, Mrs. Hodge," she chirped, in a most satisfied soprano, "what do you think? I've been to see your baby."

"Dear me," observed Mrs. Hodge, languidly, in response.

"And he's so well and so nice, and Mrs. Gipps is so proud of him, and Mr. Hodge looks so happy, and—"

"That's all right, Hester. I'm glad to hear it."

And positively Mrs. Hodge yawned. Could callous indifference further go? Miss Hester felt quite indignant and chagrined that her exertions to please the unnatural mother should meet with such ingratitude. She looked, too, what she felt, to judge by her color.

"I'm sure," yawned Mrs. Hodge, "I'm too much obliged to you but"—yawn, yawn—"I be that sleepy."

"I thought," faltered Hester, "that you'd be *glad* to hear about the little boy. Some mothers might be!"

Mrs. Hodge looked at her and laughed in a way that Hester considered to be alike silly and insulting.

"But," continued Hester, "I see I am mistaken. I won't bother about it another time. No fear."

"Don't go to lose your temper, Hester," pleaded Mrs. Hodge, awaking to the fact that Hester was rather more than nettled. "There's nothing much the matter with me except sleepiness. It's that there stout makes one drowsy, don't it? And how's John? Did he send me ever a message?"

"I don't know as he did," said Hester, dryly.

"And Mrs. Gipps—how's her rheumaticks?"

"Same as usual," snapped Hester.

Silence.

"You don't ask after baby!" observed the girl, shyly.

Mrs. Hodge flushed a little, but vouchsafed no reply to this pointed rebuke.

"If I had a baby out at nurse," persisted Hester, "I should be mis'able; yes, downright mis'able."

Again Mrs. Hodge laughed—idiotically, quite.

"Well! My!" gasped Hester, dumfounded at her very strange mood. "That there stout have made you pecooliar to-night, Mrs. Hodge."

"P'raps it have, miss," retorted Mrs. Hodge, angrily, "and p'raps it haven't. But if you mean that a woman's to fash about two babies at once, not being twins, you're talking about what you don't understand, miss, so there!"

"Mrs. Hodge!"

"I've almost enough to do, Hester, to attend to one, and I tries to drive t'other hout of my 'ead. And here you comes and *bothers!*" And Mrs. Hodge positively began to try to whimper as one very ill-used indeed.

"I'm very sorry," persistently urged poor warm-hearted Hester, "and I beg your parding, Mrs. Hodge, though I did no worser nor wish to please yer. But I sees now what it is. You'd as lief not think about your own baby; and I done wrong in interferin' and jawin' when I ought to have helded my tongue and minded my own business."

Mrs. Hodge smiled again, to the intense perplexity of this unsophisticated girl, who began to believe herself to be perpetually in the wrong. Then she said, quietly, "Don't let you and me come to quarrel, Hester. I'm an oddity, I am, and have need to be, but I wish to be friends. Only don't you interefere, whatever you does, or we shall fall out, and no mistake. Now, let's kiss."

Here this dialogue was rudely interrupted by the temporary stomachic derangement of baby the rich, who, having imbibed with human milk the essential poison of London stout, felt gripy, and gave tongue loudly to assure his attendants of this internal phenomenon.

"Drat the baby; what a row he do kick up," snarled Hester, who, though she had kissed Martha Hodge, still cherished a grievance.

"Don't say drat him," retorted the latter, rubbing the infant's part affected solicitously. "He is a love, he is, and there never was such a duck in the world."

Hester's eyes opened very wide indeed. Truly had Mrs. Hodge defined herself to be an oddity—an oddity, too, so Hester opined, not only eccentric and unaccountable, but positively unnatural. If Mrs. Hodge had not been so very pretty she would then and there have taken a dislike to her. As it was, Hester, like wiser people, cherished the superstition of her sex, that a pretty woman in her *premiere jeunesse* can not be very remote from ideal goodness; and so it came to pass that a sweet, rosy complexion, bright eyes, and a winsome smile completely magnetized and mesmerized the not very brilliant understanding of a simple serving-girl.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Hodge's transference of the maternal instinct so rapidly from her own to another woman's child continued to be an inscrutable problem to Hester, causing her to reflect much on the fickleness of feminine affections. In her heart the girl on this account more than half despised Martha Hodge, though for some indefinable reason—possibly the magnetism of beauty—she could not help being drawn toward her.

One evening, being in the housekeeper's room with that august autocrat, Mrs. Binks, and the latter administering by way of *douceur* some rather fortified cowslip wine of the true Marmyon brew, Miss Hester's tongue got relaxed and she waxed confidential to the plethoric and portentous housekeeper, of whom, when not under the influence of cowslips, she stood normally in extreme awe.

"Mrs. Hodge," said she, "hav' quite took to our baby."

"And a very proper feeling on the part of Missus Sodge—er Hodge," responded Madam Binks, with dignified lassitude. She considered it in keeping with the unities to imitate, *à la* monkey and master, the diction of the cultured, and succeeded fairly well, except in regard of the letter "h." This letter being her pet weakness, her habit was to drop it and then pick it up again.

Hence, after styling Mrs. Hodge "Missus Sodge," she blandly arrested herself, as if nothing had happened.

"But 'tain't quite nat'ral, are it, Missus Binks?"

"It's natural," retorted the housekeeper, severely, "to love, honor, and succor your social superiors."

"Suckle your superiors!" echoed Hester, not catching the words of Mrs. Binks.

"Succor, girl; that is, to do your duty in that state of life to which it has pleased my lady to call you."

'Oh!" gasped Hester.

"But," continued Mrs. Binks, meditatively, "in regard, Ester—er H'ester—of the naturalness of nursing, you may take it from me as knows the world and its ways, that these prettyish-lookin' young women of the lower orders, such as Missus Sodge—Misses er Hodge—are not much troubled with naturalness. It's the plain women, Ester—er H'ester—that has the deep feelin's!" And Mrs. Binks sighed deeply. She knew herself to be plain, and fancied herself sentimental.

Hester afterward thought and thought and thought over this enigma and its solution. So after all it was Martha Hodge's pretty face that was an index of an icy heart! Was it possible?

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CHAPTER I.

"ABREAST OF TO-DAY."

TURN the dial of Queen Victoria twenty-two degrees forward. These two decades and eight seasons have witnessed changes even in the conservative demesne of Marmyon—both Court and village. And first as regards the former and more important of the two—socially—the great house is, in respect of family, richer by one item than it was, for Lady Marmyon managed to bring into the world another son. This event occurred at Rome, a year and a half after the birth of the first-born, and the part played by Martha Hodge for Plantagenet Marmyon, the heir, was taken successfully for Errol, the second son, by an Italian peasant. It was to this circumstance that the world attributed the last-named gentleman's dark complexion and peculiar suppleness of limb, which contrasted oddly and incongruously with the pale, rather washy eye he had inherited from his lady mother, and in a far greater degree with the square shoulders and Samson-like build of Plantagenet. A wag nicknamed the brothers the hero and the villain, and the jest stuck. As for Sir Robert he had grown grizzled and irritable, while his wife was given to lying on sofas, to die-away airs, and generally to the *rôle* of the imaginary invalid. Of the socially unimportant portion of the establishment, the retainers, Mrs. Binks having developed too pronounced a *penchant* for fortified cowslips, had been compulsorily retired on a pension, and was residing at Leamington; not, however, in the character of an ex-housekeeper, but as widow of a physician, Binks, deceased forty years back, having been really and truly a cow-doctor, though primarily his profession was that of hostler,

In her place reigned Hester, who, though innocent of the sweets of matrimony, had received brevet-rank, and was known and addressed by her proper surname under the style of Mrs. Mazebrook—in the drawing-room, of course, as "Mazebrook" simply, without the prefix "Mrs.," which the servants were under obligation to apply to her. But Hester had not quite such a prosperous reign as her predecessor, for agricultural depression had set in, agricultural laborers were clamoring for higher wages, while farmers, in despair of lighting the candle at both ends, of satisfying a heavier Saturday night as well as extortionate agent, were throwing up their holdings. Consequently, Sir Robert initiated domestic reform with vigor, and Hester, on her transformation into Mrs. Mazebrook, was made clearly to understand that the Binks *régime* of peculation and waste would have to cease, and that in future the servants' hall must drink eighteen-penny tea and digest American beef—if it could. No more Darjeeling or prime Scotch, no more Welsh mutton and Edinburgh ale below stairs. Economy was forever to be the order of the day, and Sir Robert rightly trusted to a woman of Hester Mazebrook's extreme simplicity of character to enforce it. Of the rest William Benson, the gardener, remained, but Harry Hodge, John's elder brother, the keeper, had been shot dead by poachers, and his widow and family were enjoying the luxury of the workhouse, Sir Robert avowing himself quite too poor to provide for them, a plea which clearly admitted of justification, inasmuch as even with some farms unoccupied and others let at a reduced rental, his income, net, from all sources did not much exceed fifteen thousand a year. The thought of that might have consoled Widow Harry in her grim captivity, the more so because she was a weakly woman, about as ill-fitted to withstand the insolent tyranny of workhouse officialism as Lady Marmyon herself would have been, had that superlative specimen of femininity chanced to suffer such a reverse of fortune as would have placed her delicate back under its iron hand.

In the village there had been graver mutations of fortune's wheel than at the Court. Dr. Plethoric, the vicar, who had lived at Bournemouth for his health's sake, and for the spiritual health of his flock, had provided the ministrations of a gentleman of small voice and flaccid disposition, one who voted nonentity humility, had paid in the efflux of time the debt of nature. To him succeeded, by favor of her ladyship—not by any means of Sir Robert, who wanted a hunting-parson—the Rev. Cyril Orphrey. This divine, having metamorphosed everything and offended everybody, was manfully essaying to live down both the metamorphosis and offense and to atone for his Ritualism by profuse liberality. Widow Gipps, now an aged, crippled, and deaf old body, called him an angel, but Farmer Rodd, a bigoted believer in Calvin, a devil; while the baronet tacitly adopted his tenant's view, and his wife that of the old woman. In fact, the entire parish was split between the Pro and the Anti-Orphrey factions; and of course the antagonistic dispositions of Plantagenet and Errol drew them in opposite directions, the elder supporting his sire, and the younger his mother.

But the chief change in the village was at the Marmyon Arms. That temple of Bacchus proved, as John Hodge in his soul believed it would be, a curse. It changed pretty, graceful Martha into an

animated tub, loud of tongue and bold of visage, but its effects were worse upon John himself. At first the simple fellow was sparing of the dangerous fluid now entirely at his disposition, nevertheless little by little he grew more self-indulgent, until at last liquor became his master. The house thrived fairly well, for the making of a new railway brought custom, and even at his weakest John Hodge was virile enough to hold his own with the navvies. But the more the "pub" prospered, the more John imbibed, until at last the end came. John, being carried to bed fuddled, in the morning was found stone dead. It was a nine days' wonder, and the license was transferred to his widow.

There remains one individual to be noted—that child whom Martha Hodge consigned with so little external mental disquietude to the charge of Widow Gipps. He was christened Robert, and in due course sent for education to the village school, where learning seemed as if it were child's play to him. He developed in boyhood an extraordinary passion for books, and when, later on, Mr. Orphrey came to the vicarage, he pronounced him to be one of the most remarkable youths he had ever known—an encomium not quite unmerited, for Robert's mind had an amazing power of assimilation, and his imagination was ideal. As a young man, his slight, elegant figure, quick perceptions, and bright manner rendered him an object of admiration. In the bar of the Marmyon Arms, the graziers and travelers who stopped to wet their own and horses' mouths would ask for a song from Robert with their pint, and if Robert was in the humor, would enthusiastically confess to the fascination of tenor notes that only required training to render their possessor an artist of eminence. Nevertheless, the older Robert grew the less inclined was he to constitute himself a draw to the public-house. In vain Martha tried to persuade him—in her own interest. Her word was anything but law to the young man. She had administered unto him in his boyhood, indeed in his infancy, more cuffs than halfpence, and made no secret of her intention to reserve the "House" for her only other child, Miss Belinda—which romantic form of nomenclature had been suggested to Martha's mind by an exciting periodical entitled "The London Love Story"—a strapping young maiden of eighteen, endowed with the arms of Laocoon and the tongue of Xantippe. Robert, in fact, rose above his position and surroundings, he declined to be fettered by Mrs. Hodge's apron-strings, and when that robust woman blasphemed him for a lout and a fool, his reply was to walk out of the Marmyon Arms—where he had full license to loiter and booze so long as he cared to cultivate the customers - engage himself as day-laborer under Farmer Rodd, and sunder his family ties altogether. People said it was his pride, his temper, his eccentricity, yet they may have judged the young man harshly. It was partly Mr. Orphrey who had indoctrinated him with a contempt for the ethics of the pot-house; partly the result of a cerebral development superior to that of his compeers; partly, strange to relate, a love of solitude. Sharpening hop-poles in the underwood or hoeing turnips, Robert was in the company of his thoughts, which, if it be allowed to borrow a simile from nature, were surcharged with electricity. Whereas, when jostled against by his fellows, he was not only cramped but somehow dragged down from his ideal level to theirs,

which was degradingly mundane. To him serfdom under Farmer Rodd meant freedom; freedom behind the bar of the Marmyon Arms serfdom.

It was lucky for Widow Gipps that his oddity assumed this form, for the poor old soul having become a martyr to rheumatism was unable to earn her few shillings a week by washing, and would have been shipped off, without her opinion being asked, to the workhouse, had not Robert at the critical moment agreed to become her lodger. Widow Gipps had throughout these long years never ceased to exhibit a genuine interest in the boy she had brought up by hand with more than common care, and it was because Robert felt intuitively that she loved him as a son that he accepted her very humble quarters as a substitute for home.

He had his reward, for within a month of his taking up his abode in her house, Giles Williams came to be shepherd to Farmer Rodd and was allotted the cottage next door, vice John Mobbs, ejected for chronic inebriety and occasional rabbit-stealing, whereof the latter happened to be in the farmer's eyes the more heinous offense of the two. And Giles Williams brought to his new straw-thatched home not only his wife, a woman who spent her time in ailing and her breath in complaining, not only four children of various ages, but his daughter Polly also, and Polly was the Lily Langtry of Marmyon Village. All the swains fell in love with her. Plantagenet avowed she was splendid, but confided his attention to admiration at a respectful distance. Errol cast upon her a gaze that meant mischief. But Polly had soon no eyes except for Robert.

CHAPTER II.

CROSS PURPOSES.

THERE were grand doings in progress at Marmyon Court. His Serene Highness the Prince of Slumkinhausen, the relative of royalty and, be it added, its pensioner—the Grand Duchy of Slumkinhausen being doubtless exceedingly grand and exceedingly ducal, but pecuniarily a barren honor, well, this ineffable serenity had graciously accepted an invitation—no, not quite that, had invited himself—to a battue and ball which Sir Robert and Lady Marmyon had organized for the first week in October.

An event so abnormal as the visit of a personage of the social importance attaching necessarily to serenity could not but create the profoundest interest in the surrounding district. Triumphal arches were discussed, chiefly by tradesmen who hoped to have a finger in the job, and it was surmised by the very credulous that Sir Robert Marmyon would display the traditional hospitality of his ancient race by standing his tenants and their laborers a feed. Mr. Orphrey, too, seriously contemplated some sort of ornamental function for the benefit of the illustrious Slumkinhausen, but desisted on learning that his serenity was an avowed disciple of Strauss. As for the surrounding nobility and gentry, they were in a wild state of jubilation. Their males thrilled with the expectation of toadying one who was almost royal; their females, of the matronly variety, hugged

themselves with the conviction that association with anything serene implied some sort of moral elevation; their daughters didn't care a rush for serenity, Slumkinhausen, or sham royalty, but they did care for Terpsichore; and the chance of a downright good dance, a new dress, and a trifle in the way of polite love-making, all in the dull month of October, was quite too excellent not to insure their hearty appreciation. As for the youngsters, they relished the butchery much, and the ball just a little. A smoking-concert would have been more to their taste—it would harmonize also with the ideas of their prototypes and superiors in sacrificial dexterity, the Deptford Slaughtermen—still a ball, though rather a bore, was made up for in their refined sight by a previous aceldama of pheasants' blood. *Faut tuer quelque chose* is the motto of our cultured British barbarians.

The Court itself was crammed in anticipation of the arrival of his serene highness. There was the Duchess-dowager of Wolverhampton, a gay old dame who would win your money honestly if she could, but would anyhow win your money at any game of chance wherein you might have the supreme felicity of encountering her. With her was her sister, Miss McFiddle, of some place beginning with "Bally," in Galway, and her grace's unmarriageable daughter, Lady Narcissa Hardiwar. Then there was another fascinating widow, Mrs. Frankalmoign, and her daughter Ida, the beauty *in posse* of next season; Professor Augustus Lembic, the young Oxonian scientist, who had discovered in Errol Marmyon a genius for physiological investigation; and half a score of colonels, captains, and mashers, including that very clever gentleman, Captain Dolopy, who, having found his regiment rather too warm, for reasons not unconnected with a needle and a pack of cards, quitted the army and embraced the honorable profession of promoter. He came on business, viz., to form a board of direction, to include, if possible, the name of H.S.H.; for his scheme, he flattered himself, was one deserving the very highest patronage, being, in fact, nothing less than the connection of Algiers and Natal by means of direct tramway.

With so select and charming a company, the Marmyon family had their hands full; for with the exception of Dr. Lembic, who owned a brain and a tongue, and the dowager-duchess, who was gifted with a tongue but very little brain, all the pretty people required entertaining. Lady Marmyon was in the main—*malgré* her lackadaisical airs—a good hostess, but she forgot in arranging her party that essential of modern society, the polished buffoon. If there had only been imported an aristocratic low-comedy man her task would have been infinitely lightened. As it was, she and her husband and her two sons had perforce to talk restlessly, to flatter Mrs. Frankalmoign, to drop the sweetest speeches into lovely Ida Frankalmoign's lap, to cow-tow skinny, Irish McFiddle from Galway, and try and knock a gleam of intelligence out of Narcissa Hardiwar, who was less than half-witted; and withal to hee-haw with the colonels and captains and sympathize with the locomotive necessities of the populations bordering on Sahara, Captain Dolopy's one topic. It was all very nice, no doubt, but it seemed to be rather too laborious for a continuance.

We English are a practical people. Even our pleasures contain largely the element of business, though the cloven hoof of self-interest be concealed beneath a cloak of hospitality. All these people were asked to Marmyon for a purpose, and not because they were individually wanted. The duchess because of her strawberry leaves; Dr. Lembic because Sir Robert cherished a hope that he would get Errol a science fellowship; Dolopy because he had given several very straight Stock Exchange tips whereby the Marmyon exchequer had benefited; item, because in the event of H.S.H. joining the board of The Natal and Algiers Tramway Company, Sir Robert was to receive a *douceur* of shares on allotment; the colonels, captains, and mashers, partly as dancing partners for the girls who were expected at the ball, partly as professional butchers, and partly for subsidiary reasons, which it would be prolix to append *in extenso;* lastly, Mrs. Frankalmoign and her daughter Ida, because the latter was endowed both with looks and consols, and would, according to the opinion of Sir Robert and his wife, exactly fit their son Plantagenet.

As for H.S.H., he was included, as has been stated, by his own suggestion, but chiefly as the pinnacle of the social structure. Besides which he had acquired a reputation for being the *avant courier* of royalty. It was whispered that if he spoke favorably of the sport and of the people, if the pheasants were plentiful, and there was no Puritanical sentiment lurking in secret places so as to interfere with royalty's little pleasures, then the master might follow in the steps of the monkey. Now Sir Robert, as became a loyal citizen, was sincerely ambitious of entertaining a social sublimity of the first rank. It would cost a few thousands, but it would also double his importance in the county, and might—who knows?—lead to the offer of a peerage. The advent of H.S.H., therefore, teemed with the rosiest possibilities.

He came, bringing with him a body-guard in seedy habiliments, whom he addressed as Fritz, and designated, in season and out of season, "von schtupid chack-tonkey." He imported also into the social circle a hideous self-satisfied German grin, certainly one of the most repulsive grimaces in creation. Otherwise he was polite, pleased with everything, desperately attentive to Ida Frankalmoign—by no means quite to Sir Robert's satisfacion—while late in the evening he got rather glorious on hock, and boasted to "Blandagened"—as he Teutonically christened him—"Ha, my good vellow, I veel trink you try." The pheasants had a bad time of it in front of his Serenity's gun, for where he did not miss them he mangled them, and the worse he shot the more he seemed, by his loud laughter, to enjoy the spectacle of his own cruel incapacity.

After the butchery and ball his serene highness returned to the serenity of his apartments in a certain royal palace which shall be nameless, where normally he vegetated in serene grandeur and serener penury, a pensioner of superb relatives. With him evaporated the giddy duchess, the colonel and masher clique, Dolopy, and, in fine, the entire company except Mrs. and Miss Frankalmoign, who were especially pressed to remain for a fortnight, for reasons obvious enough, but which the judicious widow declined to see. Nevertheless, she knew her cards, and played them like a true woman of the world.

"What a very fine man your son Plantagenet is, Lady Marmyon!" she remarked, the afternoon following the general exit.

The fond mother, who, now the house was clear of serenity and graciousness, had returned to her sofa-existence, gazed languidly out of the window to behold that young gentleman, with Errol and Agatha Orphrey, the nun-like sister of the village padre, indulging in tennis.

"Yes," she replied, "Planny is large—too large. I can't think where he got those St. Bernard-dog-like hands and feet of his, and that colossal figure. I'm sure none of my people were behemoths, and as for Sir Robert, when we married, his waist might have been the envy of girls, and to this hour he only wears sevens."

"But," pleaded Mrs. Frankalmoign, "Plantagenet is so manly. Doesn't he row in the Dark Blue Eight?"

"Oh, yes."

"And didn't he throw a hammer, or put a stone, or perform some other herculean feat?"

"I think so," drawled Lady Marmyon. "It was very creditable, no doubt. But I wish he had either the brain or *esprit* of Errol, poor animal!"

"That would be a pity," rejoined the clever widow, "because, don't you see, Errol, not being an eldest son, has to fight the battle of life, and really requires talent as a sort of stock-in-trade, whereas Plantagenet's *rôle* is cut-and-dried, and one does not expect him to do more than play the *grand seigneur* and behave himself."

"Oh, as regards behavior," sneered Lady Marmyon, "there can be no question of contrast. Planny always was the stupid good boy, and Errol the quick-witted bad one." And Lady Marmyon smiled—oddly, indeed mysteriously. Not so Mrs. Frankalmoign. She, following her hostess's eyes, perceived at a glance the significance of that peculiar amused expresson. The fact was, Errol was making love to her precious Ida, and that young lady was reciprocating his attention, while "Planny"—who had had a hint concerning the beautiful heiress, and was more than anxious to ingratiate himself—was standing by rather vexed and considerably out of temper with things in general.

"I think," remarked Mrs. Frankalmoign, "I'll join those young people in the garden, my dear Lady Marmyon. Ida is really too imprudent. This cold autumnal blast, and nothing over her shoulders! Really, really!"

And so mamma descended upon the pair who were disposed to mate regardless of propriety and dutifulness, and dispersed them. Then Plantagenet essayed to take up the running, but Miss Ida, who disliked maternal interference, was monosyllabic and prim to the verge of rudeness, and the big man, not relishing a series of snubs, retired discomfited.

This game of cross-purposes was rehearsed for three days, much to the amusement of Lady Marmyon, and to the intense annoyance of both Sir Robert and Mrs. Frankalmoign. The match had been tacitly arranged, and yet here was Errol playing marplot. The baronet, moreover, knew well enough that the choice did not lie between the two brothers. Had that been so, he would have congratulated Errol on his fortune. But a worldly woman like Mrs.

Frankalmoign would never accept a second son for her daughter. She coveted the title and estate, though both were only in reversion, for Sir Robert was but little more than fifty and might live to be a hundred. He realized, therefore, the utter impossibility of this game of Errol's, and felt downright angry with the young fellow for interfering with his elder brother.

It was not, however, his custom—neither is it usually the custom of his order—to express their sentiments on matters of delicacy with frankness. He contrived to get his own way by a species of diplomacy that was transparent, yet not candid. His tactics were to outflank and not to meet directly. In this respect he differed *toto cælo* from his elder son.

One morning he button-holed Errol, affectionately. "My dear boy," he said, "I've had a letter from Strensham asking me to come and stop a week in Nottinghamshire. I can't go with these people in the house, no more can Planny; so I've written to Strensham to say that you will take my place at his battues. Lucky for you, my boy!"

But Errol did not reciprocate his sire's affected cheeriness. "Horrid bore," he muttered; "I don't want to go to Lord Strensham's. I hate Lord Strensham. Why don't Planny go? It would suit him, and he's a better shot than I am. Besides, why am I the scape-goat?"

"My dear Errol," replied the baronet, changing front with amazing celerity, "to be frank with you, Planny is wanted here and you are not! Now, do you see, dear boy?"

"And to be equally frank with you, father, Planny is not wanted here and I am."

"Errol?"

"That is to say, if Ida Frankalmoign's wants are what you are talking about."

"I understand you, Errol," replied Sir Robert, "and anyhow you have shown your hand. My dear fellow, don't make a fool of yourself. Miss Ida may prefer you to Planny, but recollect this—she can marry Planny, she can't marry you."

"Why not?"

"Because I say so. Because I know her mother's mind. Because your own common sense must tell you so."

"All right," rejoined Errol, doggedly. "I don't want the girl to marry me, but I won't go to Lord Strensham's."

"As you like. But if not, you will go to Oxford. Terms begin in a fortnight. You can go to Dr. Lembic's till then. He will be charmed to receive you."

An evil look overspread Errol's dark features, and the flash of fire in his usually expressionless blue eyes suggested the hate of Cain. He did not care, however, to disobey his father altogether, so he packed up his traps and departed for Alma Mater, leaving Plantagenet master of the situation.

Love, however, will find out the way. Before leaving, Errol contrived an interview with Ida Frankalmoign, thanks to the friendly offices of two maids, who arranged their tryst with secrecy and safety. Hitherto, he had merely flirted and flattered, now he needs must ascend to earnest, for Errol's was not the type of nature that

suffers defeat easily, and here he held the trump card in the palm of his hand—in his own opinion.

Ida heard his whispered love tremulously. She was little more than a school-girl, just out, and thought him the most beautiful of created beings; indeed, when their lips met, her rapture was intense. Being, however, coy and shy, under an entirely novel condition of existence, her words were few and simple. She loved him—yes, indeed, she did; and would he write from Oxford under cover to Janet, the maid? Whereunto he swore eagerly that he would live and die for her, and go through fire and water for her sake, if she would wait for him till she was of age, when her mother's authority would be limited, and they could be united.

And thus with kisses and squeezes the pact was struck and ratified by an exchange of roses—the only gifts that happened to be handy. It was the love of boy and girl, quite as much play as earnest; yet in his case a passion that might grow and expand, thereby, in respect of possibility, differing from hers, which was rather of the nature of a tender emotion, titillated by flattery, yet in essence ephemeral. She loved Errol because he had been courtly and nice, because she admired him, because she had enjoyed new feelings in consequence of his idolatry; yet when he was gone she laughed as merrily as ever, and was mischievously disposed to meet Plantagenet half-way. In short, the girl's love was mixed largely with liking, and she hardly realized how shallow it was, and how little she knew her own too malleable, plastic mind.

Her constancy was soon to be put to the test. Janet, her very obliging maid, and Sarah, the Marmyon domestic, who had combined forces together in order to arrange that critical interview, had a tiff—about a young man, of course—and Sarah, out of sheer spite, intercepted Errol's ardent epistles to his Ida, and locked them up in her box. Hence, after Ida had written two very maidenly and modest love-letters to Oxford, and had received no response, her pride took huff and she wrote no more.

Then, in revenge, as she fancied for his unfaithfulness, she began to endure Plantagenet's attentions, and perhaps just a little to relish them, albeit she candidly told her mother that if he proposed she should administer a decided refusal, adding, significantly, "The man knows I don't care for him. He has no right to ask me. I have never given him the slightest encouragement."

Plantagenet, however, quietly persevered. He was resolved to win her if he could, for her beauty and sweetness cast a spell over the huge, magnanimous, simple-hearted fellow. But his plain, honest nature forbade confidence on his part. Ida did not know the man. He would never ask to be refused. He would ask only if morally certain of an affirmative answer.

At the other end—at Oxford—Errol was rather in consternation at Ida's sudden silence, but it happened that there was plenty to occupy his mind. He had been, as has already been stated, a student of science—that is to say, chiefly of chemistry. Being now the guest of Dr. Augustus Lembic, he naturally fell in with the pursuits of that great physiologist, whose researches had, as was affirmed, gained for him an European reputation. There was, in truth, an affinity between Lembic, the son of a Scotch baker, and

Errol, the progeny of a baronet of ancient lineage. Both were by instinct utterly unscrupulous and sublimely selfish. Both were gifted with a certain brain-power and a quick perceptive faculty. Both were reckless about the torture they inflicted: indeed, Errol had enjoyed his brother's vexation at Ida's preference for him almost as much as the sweet girl's soft kiss. Hence, when he discovered that his friend and patron Dr. Lembic's favorite pastime was in vivisection, he entered into it with all the zest of enthusiasm, indeed with a natural aptitude for the sport.

One morning the breakfast-table at Marmyon Court was thrown into a flutter. Lady Marmyon, the last of the party to arrive, cried, "Dear me, quite a long letter from Errol! What can it be all about? There, dear Robert, read it out for everybody's edification."

Sir Robert, thus challenged, fixed his *pince-nez* on the bridge of his nose, and focussed his attention on the epistle of his second son. Lucky, perhaps, he did so, for the color fled suddenly from Ida Frankalmoign's shell-pink cheeks, and her heart began to palpitate terribly. She felt, in truth, almost suffocated.

"Shall I read it out?" he asked. "Yes! Is that the general verdict? Then, attention.

"'My dearest Mother,—I am having a high old time of it here.'

("Tut tut! how I hate this vile American slang. 'Varsity men thirty years ago abhorred slang, and I wish we could keep clear nowadays of such vulgarity. It's democratic; it's— Oh, where was I!")

"'A high old time of it here. Lembic is perfectly splendid. He is the apostle of investigation, and I am thankful to have been associated with his *vie privée;* for now that I am behind the scenes, and can daily witness the high-priest of science sacrificing upon the altar of physiological inquiry, I realize fully his zeal and devotion. He has made me temporarily his assistant, the fellow who performs that duty having gone to Florence to witness some glorious experiments on dogs and horses by a great luminary named Schiff, who has done more for the advancement of truth—for as Lembic says, truth and knowledge are one—than any man of the age. It is hard work, I assure you. We get through on an average two dogs a day, besides cats, guinea-pigs, mice, and an occasional monkey—a great treat, you know. Lembic is most generous. He never spares his pocket in order to secure suitable subjects, and only yesterday paid three sovereigns for a retriever, who was used up in the course of a few hours, owing to an unfortunate slip of the knife, which entered a vital part. I was really very sorry for poor Lembic, as this dog ought to have lasted a series of experiments, and with luck and economy might have lived a week. It was partly my fault too, I think, in neglecting to hand Lembic the proper instrument at the right moment, so—to make up for his loss—I have promised him my old setter-dog, Flo, and I will get you to send her off by train to-morrow. She is tough enough, and besides, as she knows me and is fond of me, I shall be able to keep her quiet; for in spite of the straps the animals will occasionally injure themselves in their writhings. Flo will make a capital subject, and I shall heartily en-

joy studying the internal mechanism of the pet of my school-boy days. I am glad to say there is no humanitarian nonsense about Lembic. He entirely dispenses with anæsthetics in vivisection, as a rule, though occasionally, for convenience's sake, if an animal is very restive, he administers a dose of curari, which, by the way, pays the beggars out for their disagreeableness, as it intensifies the pain. It is very absurd that we can not in Oxford operate on horses, but there is a difficulty even about dogs, the prejudices of certain dons being so very strong. Lembic, however, never submits to dictation. He complies with the tyrannical, meddlesome act of Parliament, just when it suits his convenience—not otherwise; in fact, his stereotyped joke is, "Now, gentlemen, we will proceed to perform an act of startling and heinous illegality." Illegality, indeed, as if either he or I or any other devotee of science were going to be Act of Parliamented! And now, to conclude this long letter, I hope every one is flourishirg at Marmyon, including, of course, Mrs. and Miss Frankalmoign, to whom please give my kindest remembrances.

"'Your affectionate son,

"'ERROL.

"'P.S.—Don't forget to send "Flo."'"

"Er—ah" gasped Sir Robert, dropping his *pince-nez;* "the boy is enthusiastic, very, and I share his respect for science and its votaries. But as regards the old dog 'Flo,'—I—er—ah! don't quite know. These experiments are, er—ah! rather—"

"What does Errol want to do with 'Flo'?" asked Ida, quite innocently, for in her trepidation she hardy realized the purport of her lover's letter.

"Cut her up alive. Torture her, not for hours, but for days," murmured the deep voice of Plantagenet. "And, by heavens, father!" he added, the blood swelling the veins in his broad forehead, "he sha'n't!"

"Torture! Errol torture a poor dog!" gasped Ida.

"Yes, my dear," glibly interposed her mamma. "The doctors do that sort of thing, you know. It's necessary."

Ida turned pale and her lips closed. This was indeed a revelation, and one she never, never expected.

"Er—ah!" continued Sir Robert. "Theoretically, physiological investigation is admirable. Practically, it goes against ones sentimentality when the subject selected happens to be an old pet, and I agree with you, Planny, Errol should consider that others are interested in Flo besides himself. As a matter ot principle, however, I am with the vivisectors. The lives of the animals are placed at our disposal, just as we utilize the lives of the lower orders of our own species for our benefit. And, really, when one comes to reflect on the philosophy of the thing, the difference between ending Flo's days slowly by Dr. Lembic's skillful knife, and relegating an old creature like Widow Gipps to the prolonged vivisection—moral vivisection, I mean, not physical—of the workhouse, resembles that which distinguished Handel from Buononcini—tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee. Ha! ha! Why, Miss Ida, you don't look well!"

"No wonder," said Plantagenet, "the subject is disgusting in the extreme!"

"It is," faltered Ida, rising and leaving the table hurriedly, in advance of the rest of the party.

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"Mamma," said Ida, that evening, as the fond mother came to perform the genial office of bed-tucking—a real pleasure by the way, for Mrs. Frankalmoign, a beautiful woman herself, keenly relished the angelic loveliness of her only child—"mamma, shall I tell you a little secret?"

"I hope, dear," responded mamma, giving the pillows a vigorous shake, "that you will never have any secrets from me. We are friends, are we not?"

Ida's large eyes gazed lustrously at her mother; then she held up her face for a kiss, and brushed away the rising tear that persisted in coursing down her downy cheek.

"I will never have another secret," she cried, passionately. "I am sure secrets are a curse."

"And this one—the particular little skeleton in the cupboard?" smiled Mrs. Frankalmoign, interrogatively.

"Oh, nothing. It's over—dead, buried, forgotten," mused the girl. Then she added, rather jerkily, "It is only that fellow, Errol Marmyon, mamma dear. I thought I loved him just a little. But I don't! I mistook my feelings altogether. In fact, I detest him and his cruel, wicked ways."

"I thought Errol was attentive!" remarked Mrs. Frankalmoign, "but I did not expect the affair had gone so far."

"Nor has it," responded Ida, impetuously. "Errol did tell me he loved me, and I told him I loved him, and we exchanged some flowers. That is all."

"But," said mamma, gravely, "that is too much."

"Why?"

"Because you had no right to play with Errol. He is a man."

"And Errol," she answered, "is not the man I thought. He is very agreeable, and that sort of thing, but what a hideous monster to think of torturing poor Flo!"

She meant also, "And what a blackguard never to answer my letters!" That confidence, however, was not for mamma's ear. It would have led to Janet's dismissal, and Janet Miss Ida considered to be her very good friend, as indeed the girl was.

Mrs. Frankalmoign laughed at her daughter's earnestness, but like a prudent woman avoided the discussion of a dangerous topic. Inwardly, however, she registered a resolve to keep Ida and Errol apart. A second son at best is the reverse of an eligible *parti*, and this one appeared to have all the devil of both his parents and of all his ancestors concentrated in his proper person. "Not good enough," muttered the affectionate mother, and she took away her daughter's candle and closed the door behind her.

The Marmyon Woods, trending the length of the chalk hills for miles, and conferring an inestimable boon on the dwellers in the valley by breaking the force of the northern and eastern blasts, are the glory of Kent. In that sweet and genial clime the variety of foliage strikes the North-country eye with amazement. There flourish in profusion oak and beech, ash, bryony, and maple, while here and there a few firs or larches intrude in this land of green

forestry; but, best of all, the giant yews, which were planted in the reigns of the Henrys and Edwards, to supply those superb boughs which gave the Saxon archers the pre-eminence at Cressy and Poictiers. These monsters of the forest on the sides of the hills impart a grandeur equaled only by the rich and rare splendor of the Chilterns, than which there exists no nobler range of forest-clad hills in Europe. The borders of the forest land of the Marmyons were bedecked with orchis, primrose, violet, and fern, but you must have a care how you tread the mossy banks of that garden of Eden, for they are guarded by vipers of a deadly sort. The woodmen and keepers have little fear of the snakes, for they wear thick boots and leather gaiters to protect the legs, but without this species of armor the botanist or artist or poet runs a fine chance of terminating his natural life suddenly and painfully.

It was an exquisite October morning. The leaves had just begun to turn, and green, red, and yellow tints were blended with a wealth that almost fatigued the eye. There was not a breath of air, only a soft sun, veiled with a sort of gossamer mist. The year had begun to die, but its decadence was even more superb than its meridian.

"Was there ever anything in the world so perfect?" murmured Ida, her liquid orbs thrilling with pleasure as she gazed upon the overhanging Flesset wood, wherein, amid the gnarled oaks, the eye might discern the ruins of Flesset Castle, a fortress built by Marmyon the Norman, and defended by the Marmyon of Charles the First's reign, against the guns of Fairfax, needless to add, unsuccessfully.

"It is really the sweetest spot on the estate," smiled Lady Marmyon, approvingly. She quite relished the family grandeur being appreciated, and the louder the praise the more she liked it.

"I wonder," remarked Mrs. Frankalmoign, "whether Plantagenet is ever coming with the luncheon-basket? He was to meet us at one, and it is now half-past," consulting a watch about the size of a marrow-fat pea.

"Are you hungry, mamma?" laughed Ida, sarcastically.

"Mrs. Frankalmoign's mechanism is regulated chronometrically," interposed Mr. Orphrey, who was one of the party.

"I don't know what that means," replied Ida, demurely, fancying herself snubbed, "but for myself I prefer this lovely moss to chicken and galantine and that sort of thing. One might do very well without food, of course so long as one had an occasional meringue or an ice, but life without mosses would be—a blank."

And forthwith she began to attack a sloping bank in front of her, which, lying beneath the undergrowth at the foot of the hill, and at the fringe of Flesset Wood, was carpeted with mosses of a tint excelling the richest emerald in the Green Vault of Dresden—an occupation not only fascinating, but positively engrossing to sweet eighteen.

Mr. Orphrey followed her in silence. He was, like most of his congeners of the Ritualist party, a sworn celibate, but, for all that, appreciative of female and every other species of beauty. He had no thought of her otherwise than of an exquisite flower, whom to admire, as such, was no sin; and further, as was perhaps unavoidable in a nature so poetical as his, he felt himself entirely in har-

mony with her ideality. But he did not interrupt her, indeed his forte was not small-talk; he only stood near and watched the mosses grow into a huge heap in the basket she carried on her arm. It was a joy to his mind to play cavalier to one so pure and simple, yet so highly refined, whereas my Lady Marmyon was exacting and Mrs. Frankalmoign frivolous, according to his estimate, and so he gladly left them to themselves, and their talk about the probabilities of luncheon.

He was immersed in a strong reverie, and indeed only half conscious of surrounding objects, when a sudden cry from Ida Frankalmoign's lips, startling him out of dreamland, caused him to bound to her side.

This was what had happened:

Ida, having all but filled her basket with moss, had placed it on the bank; then she gathered a little heap, and seizing the basket with the quick fingers of girlhood, swung it over her arm, when, lo! to her horror, from between the mosses there emerged the head of a dark gray thing.

It was an adder!

The reptile had crept up the basket from the bank, and inserted itself between the layers of moss; then, when it felt the basket move, it instinctively hurried to escape, but perceiving its proximity to human flesh, raised its head, the preliminary of the dart that means, frequently, death.

Too terrified to preserve her equilibrium, Ida, instead of trying to swing the basket off her arm, began to run, Mr. Orphrey following, and crying, "Drop it! Drop the basket!" but apparently not having the nerve or presence of mind to help.

At that critical instant there was a crash of the hazel boughs, and Plantagenet, whose eye had grasped the situation, seized the snake, drew it by main force from the basket, flung it to the earth and under his strong heel had crushed its poisonous head. The whole action, from first to last, did not occupy five seconds, and that would have been too long a span of time had not the reptile, before springing, essayed to drag itself free of the moss.

With the words "You have saved my life" Ida fell prone in a dead faint, her savior towering above her proudly, as the women came and tended the beautiful girl.

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That little episode had a moral effect. Ida was not the type of the girl to forget to express in warm terms the gratitude she felt, and the sympathetic flame of her great and glorious eye seemed like the sun ray that melts the snow. It relaxed Plantagenet's tongue, and to his surprise and charm she didn't, as of yore, repel his diffident advances; on the contrary, quietly, and with a certain reserve, she met them half-way. And thus two days before the fortnight—the period of Mrs. Frankalmoign's visit—was up, he plucked up courage, and in a few manly words asked Ida to think of him as a suitor. That was all. He would not as yet speak of marriage lest, perchance, she might mistake gratitude for love, and Plantagenet Marmyon was endowed by nature with too strong a vein of common-sense to wish to wed a wife who could not with her hand give him her undivided heart.

Her reply was simplicity itself. She said, "I like you, and admire your great courage and your manliness. I think, too, that mamma wishes it, and perhaps also your people. But—"

"What is the bar, Ida?" faltered Plantagenet.

"There is no bar—none; but I am placed in this difficulty. It is only a few days since Errol asked me something which—then—I could not exactly refuse."

"Errol!"

"Yes. He attracted me. I, perhaps, attracted him. Before he left he forced from me a promise. That I have canceled; and I tell you this, I would die rather than marry him. I never wish to set eyes upon him again. Still, you must see that I am awkwardly circumstanced."

"Well," replied Plantagenet, cheerily, "I am young, so are you. I am true as steel. With me, Ida, it is you or never. Will you come here at Christmas?—my father would arrange that with Mrs. Frankalmoign—then we shall see more of each other, and you will be able to give the verdict on which so much depends."

"Be it so," she replied, glad to be extricated from the embarrassment of a position she felt to be equivocal; for her mind was not made up with regard to Plantagenet, and under such conditions time she believed to be an insurance against an irretrievably false step.

That same evening at dinner, the fish having just been removed, in stalked, unexpected and unwelcome, Errol.

"Well, my dear fellow," observed his father, with a certain tinge of awkwardness in his manner, "and what brings you back home? Nothing happened to our charming friend, Dr. Lembic, I hope?"

"I'll take some fish," replied Errol, addressing the footman first and his sire second. "Oh, no, thanks, Lembic's all right. I only came here for Flo. As you wouldn't send her, I was simply obliged to come and fetch her."

"Er—ah," gurgled Sir Robert, while a dead silence fell upon the table. "I—er—ah—that is to say, we all—er—ah—expected that you would take a hint. It would be painful to us for the—er—ah—dog to be sacrificed in the way you propose. We have no objection to physiological investigation, Errol, far from it, but in the pursuit of science please favor us by sparing those animals whom we have—irrationally, no doubt—got to regard as friends."

Errol's dark countenance flushed crimson. "Sir," he rejoined, "you forget. The dog is my property."

"That may be, boy, but I say 'No!'"

"And," added Plantagenet, "I echo my father's verdict."

"What right have you to interfere?" This to his brother.

"Every right," interposed the musical voice of Ida Frankalmoign. "Anybody has a right to interfere between a dear dog, who has never done a human being any injury, and who has been your friend of long years, and the monster who would torture it, simply from a diabolical lust of cruelty."

"Ida, Ida!" pleaded Mrs. Frankalmoign, "really, you quite forget yourself." But mamma did not somehow look angry, in spite of her protest.

"Enough," interrupted the baronet, with dignity. "You have my decision, Errol, and I'll trouble you to change the subject."

Nevertheless, though parental authority quashed an incipient quarrel between the brothers for the nonce, it could not stop it altogether. Errol felt almost mad at Ida's marked coolness and angry rebuke; Plantagenet, who had hitherto held his younger brother in contempt, recognized in him now a rival. The billiard-room, in consequence, was the scene of a fracas, which ended by Errol striking his brother, who, in lieu of returning the blow, took him bodily by the scruff of the neck and pitched him out of the room. It was in the condition of a man utterly humiliated that Errol sought his mother's boudoir, for he knew that he might reckon on her sympathy. He was emphatically *her* son.

"What is the matter?" she asked, in amazement.

"That blackguard of an elder brother of mine," he gasped, "has insulted and assaulted me." Two lies in a breath.

"Dear me," protested Lady Marmyon, "that is very disgusting behavior of Planny. Surely he might rest content with having won Ida."

"Won Ida!" echoed Errol; "does he imagine he's won her?"

"He has won her—at least so Mrs. Frankalmoign tells me, and she ought to be well informed."

"It's false!" cried Errol, purpling. "I know better. In fact, mother, the girl's pledged to me."

"Nonsense, boy, you are too young and too poor—absurd!"

"All right, mother, don't believe it—only mark my words, she may not have me, but she'll never have that huge mammoth of an animal, Planny. Look at his hands and feet. Look at his rolling gait, for all the world as though he had been at plow all his life! Faugh! Ida's not such a pig as to associate with that creature. I don't recognize him as my brother. He's not like me or you or father. In fact I don't know who he is like, unless it's some prize-fighting cad."

"You had better go to bed, Errol," said his mother in reply.

He took the maternal advice, and on his toilet table perceived a parcel. To rip asunder the paper was a second's work. It contained his letters to Ida unopened.

CHAPTER III.

CHURCH VERSUS PUB.

THE day following witnessed a general exodus at Marmyon Court. Mrs. Frankalmoign and Ida left for Homburg, Sir Robert's diplomatic invitation for Christmas, given at Plantagenet's suggestion, having been graciously accepted. Errol returned to Alma Mater, but without poor old Flo, who licked his cruel hand lovingly, all innocent of the hideous doom he had intended for her. The baronet and his wife went off on a visit to some relations in Devonshire, and Plantagenet was left alone in his glory to shoot, hunt, ride, and read or laze according to the humor of the moment, and to represent the family on the magisterial bench. It was in

consequence of the birds being away that Cyril Orphrey put into execution a *beau rêve* of his that had ever been his wish, only he lacked the pluck to face the dire wrath of Sir Robert. In a word he announced a mission under the auspices of the famous Father L'Isle, Ritualist, Revivalist, and—tell it not in Gath, still less in Kent!—Christian Socialist.

To appreciate the vicar's motives it is necessary to comprehend his position. A mild, gentle, æsthetic, and rather dreamy soul, he had with some hesitation closed with Lady Marmyon's urgent request that he would accept the living of Marmyon. He happened to be a poor man, but then he neither cared for nor wanted money except for the Church, on which he could easily have lavished a fortune, and the poor with whom he was cordially in sympathy. On assuming office he began to do things in his own way. He was by no means a profound believer in the inspiration of Cranmer, that "right pig" whom Henry the polygamous, according to the royal and cultured phraseology, "got by the ear," and who assisted his sovereign lord to commit adultery; neither did he quite perceive the logic, at this time of day, when every scholar knows something of ecclesiastical history, and philology, of submitting his judgment to the crass sciolism of that servile mutilator of the Decalogue and of his successor in toadyism, Parker. But at Marmyon he failed to get a fair hearing. Sir Robert had never opened a book since he left the University without a degree. Plantagenet had been the bottom boy of his form at school, and after a very brief experiment of academical life had abandoned the experiment as being quite over his head. Lady Marmyon, it is true, was his supporter; not, however, on the ground of conviction, but of dilettanteism, and Errol took his side, simply, however, to oppose his father and brother, for in sentiment he was a pupil of the Lembic School, *i.e.*, a fierce Materialist.

But if the Court, which was externaly cultured, represented to the mind of Cyril Orphrey very much what a wet blanket would to a traveler in Greenland, the parish was, if possible, even more disheartening. He hoped to have found among the people some such quality as enthusiastic, hymn-singing, conventicle-loving Methodism. On the contrary he met with nothing but the Laodicean indifference of State-and-Church bigotry, and the sort of prejudice which, resting really on supreme ignorance, takes a moral stand on civil authority. Farmer Rodd, for instance, avowed that he loved his Church and held his Bible in reverence; but of the latter he knew, even superficially, but a fraction, and if you could have got at the true reason for his alleged love of Anglicanism you would have discovered it to have been based on the principle that it did not interfere with his whisky-and-water. As for the laboring-men, they, poor fellows, were too heavily oppressed by this world to give much thought to the next; nevertheless, those among them who did indulge in brain exercise, notably Robert Hodge, opined that there must be something rotten somewhere, or else the rich and comfortable would not trample on those whose toil earned the very bread they ate. These people were about as accurately instructed in theology as Farmer Rodd or their supreme feudal lord himself, but they had read something somewhere about riches being a barrier to success in

the next world, and something also about a cup of cold water, and hence, perhaps, their stupid inability to put two and two together and indulge in an unctuous and contented optimism.

Rightly or wrongly, Mr. Orphrey was dissatisfied with the mental, moral, and spiritual status of the flock over which he was shepherd; nevertheless, so long as Sir Robert was in residence—and he seldom, except in the height of the London season, was absent from his petty principality—there was no chance of stirring the mud. The baronet voted himself the earthly deity of every man, woman, and child on his estate, and for the vicar to start a mission with a Ritualist-Revivalist-Radical spouter would have seemed to him rank rebellion. A stronger man than Cyril Orphrey would have faced the lion in his den; he, on the contrary, preferred to fight when the opposing general's back was turned—a rather unheroic proceeding, perhaps, but well meant.

It was Sunday morning, and the village having been placarded with small posters stating that an eight days' mission would be conducted by the Rev. Father L'Isle, who would deliver his opening address on that occasion, the pretty village church was thronged, even Farmer Rodd's curiosity attracting him. The preliminaries were reduced to a minimum, and then from the vestry, habited in a simple surplice, but with a beretta on his head, advanced a man of great stature and venerable mien. The pulpit stairs creaked under the weight of his heavy tread, and as he confronted the villagers he looked colossal and commanding. Then he removed his beretta, and in a deep, musical, tell-tale bass voice, began: "I have been asked to come here for a definite purpose. Your pastor tells me that you are drowsy, narcotized by overwork and pinching poverty and ignorance. You don't care much what becomes of you to-day, and you certainly care less for the fate of the morrow. Is that so? Do any of you own that hitherto life has appeared to be utterly purposeless—a kind of error for which you are not personally responsible, though some of you have perpetuated it by bringing children into the world? I think I read the answer 'Yes' in your faces. Well, my business to-day is to try and convince you that life is no error, but that the fault lies at the door of those who make it so, and that as regards that great to-morrow, which we Churchmen call Eternity, it is so important that you mustn't lose a moment in providing for it."

To quote a tithe of Father L'Isle's address, which, commencing with cold logic, warmed gradually to blood-heat, would be wearisome, since he had necessarily to travel over ground both trite and tedious. Suffice it that he traced the Church from its origin as a social or co-operative system for the benefit of all, whether styled clerics or laics, to the Middle Ages, when it was a clerical co-operative institution of vast magnitude, and one also recognizing its obligation to labor, and so on to the present day when it has retained the mediæval privileges as far as it could, but has repudiated its responsibilities, and instead of being the champion of the rights of labor, has joined hands with the rich in repressing the poor. It was when he had thus baldly and boldly delivered himself of sentiments which caused Farmer Rodd to scratch his poll and cough angrily, that the preacher, in stentorian tones, cried, "Blessed are ye poor! Ay, blessed!"

Then he paused.

"What!" he cried, "blessed? That surely is a bitter jest. Is it a blessing to work, from sunrise to sunset, six-sevenths of a man's manhood at the rate of threepence an hour, and in old age to be incarcerated in a workhouse? Is it a blessing to subsist on a diet of the commonest bacon and the coarsest cheese, with a fluid composed of brewer's chemicals for your sole luxury? Is it a blessing to be unable to do more for your children than to prevent them from starving? Is it a blessing to endure all this throughout the long, long years, and to be eye-witnesses of the splendor and comfort of others for whom all this manhood of ours slaves? Is it a blessing, think you, for the bee to see the hand of a man appropriate the honey, to amass which it and its fellows have been energizing ceaselessly throughout spring and summer? No. In the name of common-sense, no. The blessing of the poor is not present but prospective; but, I tell you this, if the old principle of the Church —a principle which I will term share and share alike—were re-enacted; or if, for that is too far off, the clergy, as in the Middle Ages, made it their business, a positive point of honor, to see that age and feebleness and sickness did not suffer either in mind or in body, and forced—yes, *forced*, for the Church then was not the serf of an Atheistic State—the rich to deal justly, if not generously by the poor, then we should be nearer to the Kingdom of God, for all would be able to worship without any sense of inequality or injustice."

Of course the preacher did not stop here, albeit he had spoken for an hour. He was leading up to a peroration on the crucifix, which, life-size, hung from the chancel arch, in defiance it is to be feared of my Lord Penzance and his wire-pullers, the Church Association.

"Look there!" he whispered, yet so that his voice traveled to every angle of the church. "Look at that figure in its intense agony, and remark, if you will, that human art, when it tries to represent the Passion, fails to portray that Face, which was more marred than the face of any other man. Was He blessed on the cross? He was poor; He had not where to lay His head; and He was tormented so that your grievances are as light afflictions compared with His. Can you term Him blessed? Yes."

That was all.

Sermons in nine thousand nine hundred and ninety cases out of ten thousand miss their mark. They are not nature, and they are not art. This man's was both. Hence it affected the audience, as Mr. Irving, or any really sublime artist, can affect an assemblage gathered hap-hazard. There were tears; better still, the feeling created was one of enthusiasm. The poor fellows regarded Father L'Isle, at once, not only as an apostle, but as a man who could sympathize with their sore needs. Even Farmer Rodd, before he left the church, muttered that the "feller's religion were werry convincing, but that he wished he weren't such a darned Radical." However, the best test of Father L'Isle's magnetic influence was this—the whole parish turned into church at nine o'clock on Monday evening, and on each of the following evenings, while after every fresh appeal the vestry was extemporized into a confessional, so that one by one the majority of Mr. Orphrey's flock were brought

into personal relations with the good father, and thus became stamped with the impress of his conviction.

Among those who listened rapturously and appreciatively was Robert Hodge. That young man, as has been said, was, on account of his intelligence and refinement, a *protégé* of Mr. Orphrey, and—oddly enough—perhaps, for that very reason, coupled with his dislike of his class and love of solitude, he had hitherto felt but little sympathy for the laborer. His experience of the Marmyon Arms led him to view the poor fellow in rather a jaundiced light—to wit, as one who would sell his soul for a pint of sophisticated beer. Father L'Isle, however, suggested to his mind new ideas as to the possibilities of labor; and the threepence an hour—his own remuneration—constituted rather a powerful argument in favor of amelioration. In short, while others were fascinated by the preacher's enunciation of what was, in their ears, a new economy, but were moved especially toward religious emotion by his appeal to their conscience, it was the economical doctrine rather than the religious which affected Robert most strongly. A mind like his was too inquiring, too speculatively inclined to be capable of rising to the exalted level of a grand religious enthusiasm. The young man was indeed, without knowing it, intuitively poet and metaphysician rather than religionist. Nevertheless, he was a good hearer, and of the congregation none could have repeated so perfectly the *ipsissima verba* of the great orator; but it is equally true, while the bibulous and profane, the foolish and the profligate, were with bedimmed eyes crowding to the vestry door in order to profit by the advice of Father L'Isle, and to seek the illumination of soul which he assured them might be obtained, Robert Hodge avoided this informal confessional or directory, call it which you will, and after each service went home to think and sleep over his thoughts, of which he was autocrat.

Mr. Orphrey remarked this. "Of all my parish," he said, "I imagined Robert Hodge to be the most devotionally inclined. He has always affected the church, and if we boasted men's voices I should ask him to join the choir; indeed, I have thought of supplementing the boys by his beautiful tenor, even without basses or altos. Yet, somehow, while others have been brought under the influence of this great revival he has shown no sign of penitence. Perchance the cause may be found in his attachment for Polly Williams. Father L'Isle remarked, appositely, 'Lovers make poor catechumens,' and so it is."

The worthy man was in error. He had never analyzed Robert's mental composition critically, and perhaps, from his priestly point of view, he could not understand youth being both moral and ideal, yet devoid of religious sentiment.

What is one man's meat is another man's poison. Father L'Isle octave came to an end like other good things, and amid the warm thanks of the hearty poor of Marmyon parish he took his leave, having filled Mr. Orphrey's half empty church for him. The immediate effect of the mission was, however, not only to create a congregation, but to empty the Marmyon Arms. The triumph of good always involves the defeat of evil; the supremacy of God, the downfall of the devil.

Mrs. Martha Hodge and her cherry-cheeked daughter Belinda had

not been of the number of those submitted to the marvelous magnetism of Father L'Isle. Both may have felt that there was a certain inevitable antagonism between that priest's preaching and the business whereby they made a living; but whether they felt that or not, one thing is certain, that when on that memorable Monday evening the bar of the Marmyon Arms was virtually empty, they began to turn their tongues in a diabolical duet against Father L'Isle, Cyril Orphrey, and the Church of England. "What right had that there sickly-looking piece of goods, Lady Marmyon, to bring that there Rittleish feller Horphrey into a respectable parish? How did Sir Robert expect to get his rent for the Marmyon Arms if so be customers were driven away by all that Papish mummery?" Mrs. Hodge, too, as evening after evening wore away with barely a glass sold, took to all sorts of meaningful mutterings and direful menaces against persons or things unknown, for toward evening her utterance had of late years got to be rather thick and incoherent, while her complexion became more florid, for the nonce, as her voice grew more indistinct. Still, threats or no threats, matters did not improve. There is no Act of Parliament to compel agricultural laborers to buy malt or spirituous liquors against their will. Father L'Isle had battled with the demon of drink, as well as with sundry other demons, and had beaten it all along the line. *Ergo*, the angel of that demon had to sit perforce at an empty bar and grin and bear it, in hopes that eventually seven devils might take possession of the mortal tenement which had been so thoroughly purified by priestcraft.

Of course, the world being constituted as it is, slowly and by degrees one after another displayed symptoms of returning to that wallowing in the mire which Mrs. Hodge considered to represent an earthly paradise for working-men. Nevertheless the process took time, and in the interim the trade of the Marmyon Arms was not so much depressed as paralyzed, so much so that one fine morning Martha Hodge put on her bonnet, with the cherry-colored ribbons—she had long since discarded widow's weeds—and waddled up to the Court—she was very adipose in respect of tissue—to lodge a complaint with Master Plantagenet against her enemy, the parson.

"Which it were, young sir," she said, "as I were your foster-mother, and many's the kiss I've given your little body! You was a fine baby, you was, with the temper of a hangel, and I've watched you grow up, sir, with as much pride as though I'd a bin your actual mother as bore you. That I have."

Plantagenet had just finished half a spatched-cock fowl with mushroom sauce, an omelet, toast, marmalade, coffee, and spiced beer—a frugal breakfast according to his modest notions—and was endeavoring to quicken digestion by the artificial aid of a cigar that cost, by the pound, only tenpence halfpenny.

"Yes," he replied, smiling sleepily and puffing a volcanic volume of smoke from that crater, his mouth, "I know you're my deputy-mamma, Mrs. Hodge, and for every reason I should like to serve you, but what can I do? I didn't patronize the church and sit under this precious Father L'Isle—in fact, when my people are not at home I generally go for a walk instead of to church. It's a more wholesome proceeding from my point of view. But I don't see how I can interfere. The vicar brings a sort of apostle here, and the man per-

suades the people that drink is the devil. Well, I suppose he's not far out."

"You oughtn't to say so," rejoined Mrs. Hodge, pertly. "You take your glass like a man, you does."

"Yes. But it don't pick my pockets, or starve my children, or damage my liver. Still, I understand, my good woman, what you're driving at. The vicar's emptied your till, and that means loss, if not smash, to you and yours."

Mrs. Hodge beamed upon his manly form quite seraphically. In fact she bothered him, though he was much the reverse of nervous, by her steady and intrusive, if admiring stare. "Yes," was all her vacuous reply. She was evidently thinking of something else beyond the subject of their conversation.

"Well," he said, sharply, "then all I can do is to tell my father's agent to drop your rent for the half year; take off ten per cent. say, if that will do?"

Martha Hodge pursed up her mouth negatively.

"Twenty per cent., then? Why, dash it, you don't want to beg off your rent altogether, do you?"

"I'm not a-beggin'," she retorted. "I wouldn't demean myself so far as that, Master Plantagenet," the color rising to her cheeks. "Perhaps, if I choose to speak plainer I might be heard further, but that's neither here nor there. I don't go to say as a trifle off the rent might not come in handy, but that ain't it. I wants that there Horphrey turned out."

"Faugh! Ridiculous! Sir Robert couldn't do it if he would, and wouldn't if he could. He's not Mr. Orphrey's master."

"No?" she replied, dubiously. "Then I read, I did, in my newspaper wrong. I read, I did, of a Church Persecution Association—or some'at of the sort—as turns out them Rittelish chaps. Why don't Sir Robert put that lot on to Horphrey?"

"Why? Because he's not a blackguard. No, no, Mrs. Hodge. There's nothing in that game, but we won't see you go to the wall. If the public-house is empty, Sir Robert will forego his rent. That I promise you, on my honor. Come, won't that satisfy you?"

"But there's the brewers. And I's got to live, and keep my daughter, and pay rates and all that."

"Ah, yes, of course."

"You'll stand my friend, won't 'ee, sir?" pleaded Martha, a tear in her eye. "Remember, young man, I be your mother, your foster-mother that is, and you won't go to let me be sold up."

"I hope not," smiled Plantagenet, flinging away his cigar-end. "And now, ta-ta, Mrs. Hodge, I'm off, to Canterbury by the next train. So, there! I won't forget you—never fear!"

As Martha Hodge waddled back home through that grand avenue of witch-elms, the tears fell like rain from her eyes. "He don't care for me—and I that were to him all that woman could be! To hear him talk in that grand way, it were more than human natur' could abear. Well, John Hodge, may be you was right after all, and I'd better have gone to 'Meriky than out a nussin'."

So these tears were not tears of sorrow, but of pique!

CHAPTER IV.

THE GREEN EYE.

AN autumn in the sweet valleys of sunny Kent is one long romance. The great chalk hills defend the shire both from the demoniac east and the biting north wind, and the hop culture which brings grist to the farmer's pecuniary mill, and has made the name of Kentish yeomen proud in the annals of England, necessitates a large growth of underwood, for hops require poles, and poles have to be grown and renewed. It is the underwoods which render the shire so supremely gorgeous. The underwoods are the glory of a land that teems with natural beauties, a land of sunshine, sweetness, and smiles.

So thought Robert Hodge as he toiled away on the crest of the chalk hills, with a superb view wending away to all points of the compass, and around him clusters of oak, ash, beech, and other poles. They had temporarily cleared a patch of ten or twelve acres, leaving the stumps of the timber to cast forth fresh shoots and then yield another crop of hop-poles some seven or eight years hence. His business was to sharpen the points of the poles, so as to render them easy to "set," as the term is. It is rough carpentering work, very enjoyable with a pleasant sun overhead and a soft southern breeze to fan the face.

"What be ye thinkin' about?" rang forth a merry girl's voice at his elbow, causing him to drop his ax and start.

"You, Polly!"

"Likely indeed! More silly you, then! You oughter to be thinkin' of the hop-poles, you did." And Polly Williams, with the Langtry eye and Langtry smile, gazed archly at her lover's earnest hazel eyes.

"Well," said he, coolly, "p'raps I were; p'raps I weren't. I think of you a good bit, girl, a good bit, more particularly at night-time. It's the stars that turn a man's head toward love, Polly, not the sun."

"The stars!" she echoed. "They turns a feller's 'ed to sleep, I expects, unless he've got the indigestion."

"Not mine," he laughed. "However, to be truthful, Pol, I was wondering just now what I should do with all this grand estate if I were Robert Marmyon instead of Robert Hodge. That was my thought, Pol."

"You'd give I the go-by," quoth she, tentatively.

"Not me," said he, indignantly. "In fact, girl, if I say I'm glad to be as I am, 'tis because I'm your equal and you mine. No; I was thinking, Pol, whether, if I were lord here of all these lands and woods, whereon a colony, if I might put it so, might earn a living, I should stick to it all myself, or let others share it along with myself."

"I'd share it—and glad!" tittered she, merrily.

"Ah, yes," grandly. "You pretty things don't look beyond yourselves much. No harm, either. But men are different."

"Men are selfish enough," retorted Polly; "but there! I didn't

climb up this yere hill to talk chatter. I've come from Mrs. Mazebrook, Robert. She wants ever such a lot of moss. My lady's comin' home from Devingshire, or somewhere, this very evening that is, and Mrs. Mazebrook, she says, says she, Polly, says she, do 'ee, like a good girl, she says, get I that there moss out of the under'ood. So I says, I'm agreeable, Misses Mazebrook, and she says, says she, your young man, she says, can easily put you in the way of getting a barrer load if you wish. Not as Mrs. Mazebrook wants a barrer full, but she give me this big basket, and I've got to fill it, I have, with proper mosses, too, Robert. The sorts my lady asks for always. Them as looks like seaweed."

"That's a job soon done," replied Robert, and forthwith he groped in and around a pile of logs that had been felled a year ago, and with incredible celerity filled the basket with moss, adding some exquisite ferns, picked from the fringe of the uncut wood on the brow of the hill.

Then they sat down and prattled and kissed as lovers will—*honi soit qui mal y pense*—till Master Phœbus, scandalized by such very rococo proceedings, showed symptoms of deserting the improper land of Kent for the more correct counties of Surrey and Hants, a natural phenomenon which pretty Miss Polly took as a direct hint to depart betimes.

"There," said she, "I declare you've bin a messin of me all this arternoon, and never done no work at all! I calls it a cheatin' of Farmer Rodd, I does, Robert."

"I won't cheat him," replied the young fellow, proudly. "That's not my way. An extra hour to-morrow morning will make up, with a little elbow-grease, for an idle afternoon. 'Tain't men as cheats. 'Tis masters."

They were shading hands and about to part when Polly, with a bright, saucy smile, exclaimed, "There, now! Just like my memory. 'Tis as drippin' as a sieve. Blest if I weren't forgettin'. It's Master Errol's message."

"Master Errol," glooming over; "why, he's at college or somewhere, ain't he?"

"No, he bain't, so there! He came home unexpected from Oxford College yesterday night, and Mrs. Mazebrook she tell me something about a fellowship as he did ought to have got and haven't. But of course I don't rightly understand they things; they isn't in my way."

"Yes, Polly, but this message?"

"Steady, Dobbin! Don't 'ee put I in a flurry. You see it were this way. Mrs. Mazebrook she sent for me, and as we were a talkin' about one thing and the t'other—them moss in partickler—in come Master Errol arter a bit of wire—he were goin' to do something to a big rat as John had cotched in the stables—and when he sees me he goes to chuck I under the chin. He! he!"

"Confound his cheek," gasped Robert, reddening to the very roots of his hair at this confession.

"It were only his fun. Then Mrs. Mazebrook, she says, says she, 'That won't do, nohow, Master Errol,' and—he! he!—I can't help laughin', Robert, you do look so solemn—well, he gives I a kiss and says, 'You is a pretty girl, you is,' he says, says he."

"I'll punch his head for him," muttered Robert.

"No, no," cried Polly. "That you sha'n't. I forbid it. What's the 'arm of a bit of fun? He don't mean nothin', not he, so don't go to be jealous, dear. Besides, if he cared for me ever so, I don't care for him."

"But the message?" repeated Robert, trying hard to smile, and succeeding only in distorting his physiognomy.

"Well, I'm a-comin' to it. You see, Mrs. Mazebrook she give me that basket, and she says, now, my girl, she says, you be off and git them mosses for my lady, or else, says she, the day'll be gone."

"Yes."

"Mosses!" says Master Errol. "Where be you a-going for them? Says I, to Flesset under'ood by Flesset'ood. Sir, I says, my young man's at work there, I says. Oh, says he, he says, is he, then tell him I'll give him five shillin', he says, for a live weasel or stoat, he says. So there's a chance for you, Robert!"

"I don't want his five shillings—not I! Let him keep it."

"You great, stupid, jealous silly!"

"Besides, what does he want with a weasel or a stoat? He ain't a school-boy—he's a young man."

"I don't know. But I wouldn't refuse his money if I was you, Robert. It's easy earned," dryly.

"I don't want money, Polly," he replied, dreamily. "If I did want it I should be behind the bar at the Marmyon Arms instead of here. No; if you think that you misjudge me."

"But," tittered she—his serious mood rather bored her—"girls like money; they like new things and all that. See!"

"And I don't give you presents, Polly?"

"No, Robert, that's not it. I don't ask for presents, nor do I wish for 'em. But—"

"You think I'd better collar what I can get in order to have something in case you should want them? Is that it?"

"Ah, yes! You're jealous—that's what's wrong with you, Robert. But come, dear, how late 'tis! Now, wish me good-by, and mind, YOU TRUST ME!" solemnly.

"As far as I can see you," laughed he, rather cynically.

And so they parted; she to run down the steep chalk hill with her basket of moss, he to continue his routine of pole-sharpening and think of her, of Errol, and of sundry social problems wherewith his pericranium was just then filled, for Father L'Isle had set him thinking, and the more he thought the more democratic he became.

* * * * * * *

Polly took the quickest path through the underwood, and arrived at length nearly at the base of the hill. Here her path bore to the right, through Flesset Wood, beneath the gray ruins of Flesset Castle, which venerable memorials of the feudal past were all but obscured by the quivering forest-trees.

At an angle of the path she started, for there *vis-à-vis* right across her way lolled, smoking a cigar, no less a person than Errol Marmyon.

"What an unconscionable time you've been!" he grumbled. "That young man of yours must be gifted with magnetic influence. Who is he?"

"Robert Hodge," replied she, timidly essaying to pass him.

"Oh, Robert Hodge," seizing her arm firmly. "Well, as you've given the best part of three hours to that lucky fellow, you can spare me a few minutes, I hope?"

"I'm late, sir," she faltered, "and Mrs. Mazebrook, she—"

"Oh, bother Mazebrook, I'll put that all right."

And he quietly passed his arm round her waist. Then the Langtry eyes changed from their normal expression of dreamy, soft sweetness to a hard steel. There was grit in this laborer's daughter.

"I want to go back at once, Mr. Errol," she said, "and I don't like being interfered with. Let me alone, please."

"Tut, tut!" he replied, coolly. "You're very pretty, and you know it. It's not my fault that you've made me love you—yes, love you at first sight. But I don't care to offend you. I've been waiting here, like a fool, goodness knows how long. You told me, you know, you were going to Flesset, and I could not help taking the hint. Still, if you won't spare me five minutes' talk, good. That's my ill-luck."

And releasing her, he smiled superbly.

These tactics were just a little bit effective. She wished to escape, yet it seemed rather ungracious, after this fine gentleman had made her so very candid an avowal of his sentiments, to avail herself of the opportunity without returning his civility somehow, though the precise manner was far from easy.

"Mr. Errol," said she, "you oughtn't to talk so. It is no good for either of us and you know it is not."

His eyes wore a strange expression as he replied, "As you will, child. Yet, somehow, if it wasn't for that swain of yours, Robert Hodge, I venture to guess you might favor me with a smile. Eh? Am I very vain?"

There was a tone of quiet flattery about this that affected her in spite of herself. But she was equal to the occasion.

"I don't know, I'm sure," she said. "You're a gentleman, sir, and there's a long distance between us."

"I don't make it," he pleaded.

"And if there wasn't," she added, with quiet dignity, "there's my Robert; so good-evening, sir."

"No offense, Polly!" he yawned, languidly.

The girl did not answer, but hurried away quickly, feeling all-overish and wretched. She had repulsed the man, so far so good, but ought she to have been firmer? She did not quite know. Perhaps she ought.

But there was an even graver problem to be decided. Ought she to tell Robert what had happened? She was not quite sure about that. If only she could make certain that he would keep his temper she would out with it, for a secret burned her as it burns every daughter of Eve under the sun. But Robert had a temper. Robert's disposition was jealous. Robert might take the law into his own hands, and pound that elegant, masher-like form of Errol Marmyon to a jelly. No. That was not to be thought of. A *fracas* would do no good and might lead to their being separated, besides which—to be just—Errol had in a measure atoned for his insolent familiarity by releasing her, and after all, girl-like, she did not quite relish

the thought of punishing any man for the offense of admiring her beauty overmuch. Pretty women feed on admiration, and seldom quarrel with her pabulum, unless it is very indigestible or disagreeable indeed.

Nevertheless, Polly Williams did not act with all the wisdom of the serpent, for although she refrained from confiding in Robert or her mother, she went for a walk on the following Saturday evening with Belinda Hodge, who cultivated her acquaintance sedulously, being in truth not a little proud of association with a local Langtry whose presence was a sate draw of all the village swains. Now, when two girls, who are rather friends, go for a walk, the odds are that something will ooze out; and though in this instance the something was small, and did not pour forth in a stream of confidence, still Belinda heard enough to give her a very clear idea of what had happened. An imperfect sketch can always be filled up by a clever artist, and the disjointed hints of Polly were easily dovetailed, colored, and shaded by Belinda's imagination, so as to resemble fact.

Further, Belinda, being a barmaid, felt herself overpowered by a strong sense of sisterly duty. Barmaids notoriously are gifted with tender consciences, and Belinda was no exception to this rule. So she took the earliest opportunity of giving her dear brother Robert, who really detested her, a broad hint, and when that rankled, yet another, and then a sort of straight tip evolved wholly from her own vivid imagination, by which she wrought the hot-blooded, poetical young lover to a state bordering on frenzy, and sent him at boiling heat to demand an explanation from the object of his adoration.

Polly Williams gave it, or rather he extorted it from her by main moral force. She, however, would not utter till he had sworn by his great love for her—the most binding oath that she could have asked—that he would neither lay a finger on Errol nor open his lips to that very tortuous specimen of patrician refinement on this delicate subject. Withal, Polly knew that Robert's word was inviolable. He might hate like Mephistopheles, but if he pledged himself not to strike, his arm would be paralyzed. The young dreamer could not be petty—even in his jealousy.

And yet Miss Polly hardly realized the depth of a man's anger or the consequences that might ensue from it. Had she forecast the issue, she would have been more cautious about opening her heart ever so little to a tittle-tattling piece of vulgar finery like Belinda Hodge. In her simple soul she thought, "Enough. I love him. He knows it. He loves me. I know it too. We shall be married soon. With the primroses and violets he suggested. There is no cause for jealousy."

But she did not realize that her Robert, up in that underwood on Flesset Hill ground his teeth in wrath, and cursed not only Errol but all the house of Marmyon, the survival of the feudal system, and things in general. It was only about a week later, when a meeting of agricultural laborers was advertised to be held on the green of Marmyon village, opposite the Marmyon Arms, to denounce landlords and clamor for equal political rights, that fair Polly began to comprehend the peril of jealousy; for to her horror and dismay it was announced in print that the meeting would be addressed by

Mr. Robert Hodge, one of the farm-laborers on the estate of Sir Robert Marmyon.

This indeed was news enough to cause Polly Williams apprehension, for thus Robert threw down the gantlet to Farmer Rodd, to his feudal superior, and to the entire social system under which they lived. It was rank rebellion, and would doubtless entail upon the rebel condign punishment, mayhap permanent ostracism.

CHAPTER V.

FAIR SPEECH; FOUL PLAY.

SIR ROBERT MARMYON returned home just in the nick of time to scent from afar the malodor of the Franchise meeting. The Court, it is true, was situated at a sufficiently remote distance from the village-green, the scene of that—to his well-balanced mind—hideous profanation of our sacred Constitution. It was separated not only by the park palings and the thick belt of environing timber, which effectually shut out the vulgar high-road, but by the distance of a good half-mile of English soil; so that unless the political agitators chose to employ dynamite there was not much chance of the repose of the Court being disturbed. Nevertheless the autocratic baronet felt himself considerably aggrieved by a meeting of this character being held within the limits of his demesne, and he was particularly annoyed to learn that this outbreak of the communistic spirit, as he euphemistically put it, followed so fast upon the heels of Father L'Isle's mission. The good man did not swear—he was too gentle for that—but he fumed and fretted, raged and raved, till at last Lady Marmyon got fairly out of temper.

"Really, Robert," remarked her ladyship at dinner, "you take his affair absurdly to heart. Let the people talk it they want to. Is not liberty of speech said to be a safety-valve?"

"That depends very much," he replied, "upon the amount of caloric. I don't object to a safety-valve. What I dread is lest these unprincipled agitators should create such a volume of heat as will cause an explosion. Besides which, apart from metaphor, I know what it all means. It's an evident defiance of me: yes, of ME, Lady Marmyon. They come here to excite my people against me, to preach local sedition, to disrupt the sacred bonds which bind society together and safeguard the rights of property. It is the motive underlying their acts which exasperates me; and I'm sorry to say I can not acquit Mr. Orphrey of blame. He has paved the way for all this by bringing here that lunatic L'Isle, to fill the people's stupid heads with all sorts of strange ideas, and I tell you frankly, though the man's a *protégé* of yours, I don't thank him for it."

Lady Marmyon bit her lips in pique. "Why import poor Mr. Orphrey into the business?" she pleaded.

"You are right, mother," interposed Plantagenet; "Martha Hodge came boring me only the other day about her public-house being empty, owing to L'Isle or Orphrey or some influence of the clerical kind, and now it's all t'other way. I came by the Marmyon Arms half an hour before the dinner-bell rang, and there was the

whole village swarming like bees round Madam Hodge's bar. Radicalism, clearly, is a thirsty creed."

"Disgusting!" grunted Sir Robert, sipping his excellent Beaune. "I have long since given up all hope of the lower orders. Swine, my dear boy—swine by instinct and by habit! Thomas," to the attendant flunkey, "how often am I to tell you when you help venison to allow everybody their fair share of fat? You've given me positively none." And Sir Robert's visage reddened with indignation at the wrong and robbery inflicted upon him by the too-neglectful Thomas in his capacity of carver.

"I think," observed Plantagenet, after the adipose tissue of the slaughtered buck had been piled upon Sir Robert's platter by the obsequious Thomas, "I'll stroll down and hear what these cads have got to say. Will you come, Errol?"

"No, thank you. I should have great pleasure in vivisecting them if there was no law to the contrary, but I've no ambition that they should vivisect me."

"You'll run a chance, Planny, of—er—ah—a shindy," suggested Sir Robert, rather nervously.

"Probably get your head broken, and then I shall have the bore of nursing you," dryly remarked Lady Marmyon.

"Or," laughed Errol, in a sardonic voice of *mauvaise plaisanterie*, "perhaps get potted altogether, and that would be good business for me."

"Errol," said Sir Robert, sternly, "that is a speech which—er—ah—rather grates; yes, grates on my ears. No cheese, thank you. For what we have received—hum—hum."

Plantagenet Marmyon, with all his faults, could not be termed coward. As a matter of fact he was quite as much amused as angry at this demonstration on the village-green, and the notion of anybody daring to molest one of this thews and sinews he at once dismissed as chimerical. So, lighting a cigar, he strolled leisurely down to the green, and uninvited—perhaps unwelcome—mingled with the throng of some three hundred men gathered not only from Marmyon, but from all the surrounding villages. Business had already begun, and the wagon which served for a rostrum was occupied by Mr. Hercules Flaymar, of the Central Democratic Leverage Union, an orator of the iron-mouthed sort.

"Men of Marmyon," he cried, "I come among you to-day to urge you, one and all, to play the man—to strike one decisive blow for your rights. And what do I find when I come here? The old, old story—a feudal landlord and a feudal parson. Rent and tithe—tithe and rent. The cream for the idlers and the skim-milk for the workers. You are poor, all of you. It don't need for me to look into your thin faces to know that. And why so? Why, because, my lads, you're content to let that vampire up at Marmyon Court suck your blood. That's why. I'll say nothing about the lesser leech, the parson; I'm coming to him by and by. We'll fly first, if you please, at the big game You fellows who work on that man's estate up at that Court, then, or whatever you call the place, you get at the outside a pound a week."

A voice: "Eighteen shillin', sir, and two shillin' off for rent of cottage."

"Thanks for the correction, my friend; that only augments the force of my argument. Your net income amounts to little over two shillings a day. Now this grand gentleman, your landlord, without you would be simply beggared. He couldn't do without you, and yet he cuts you down to that starvation figure. Very good. That being so, I think he deserves at your hands whatever he may chance to get—ha! ha! And the time's drawing nigh, my lads, when, instead of you're being at his mercy, he'll be at yours. At present you have no vote—no voice in the laws which others make for you, and which you have to obey. You are going to be enfranchised; and if only you'll all of you, from one end of the land to the other, combine, and return to Parliament proper mouth-pieces to speak and vote for you in accordance with your will, I tell you this, you may be each one of you his own landlord. The solid vote will do that for you when you have got it; but you'll have to vote solid, or those that rule over you will make a cat's paw of you, as they have of the little tradesmen and mechanics in many of the boroughs. And not only shall you be your own landlords, my boys, but, please the pigs, we'll sweep away the last rag of superstition. That Church has been a clever contrivance to make you content with your miserable penury. 'Oh,' says the parson, 'you chaps are badly off now, but just think how well off you're all of you going to be t'other side of the grave.' A pretty tale, indeed!"

"It might be a worse one," here interposed a single dissentient voice.

"What!" shouted the speaker. "Has superstition such a grip on some of you that it positively causes you to hug your chains? Come, come, my bully boys, don't be fools. What am I? I'll tell you. I'm an atheist. That's what I am. An atheist. I don't believe a syllable of all the trash I'm told by people who want to make money out of my simple credulity. That ain't good enough for Master Hercules Flaymar, of the Democratic Leverage Union. But I'll take my Christian friend there, who has entered his protest against my denunciation, on his own ground. He believes, I suppose, as he professes himself to be a believer—"

The same voice, "Ay, ay."

"A believer, I say, and therefore one who believes in the eternity of punishment. He must do so if he is honest, for it is written in the Book, and there's no escaping it. If you take the Book, you must take it with all it contains, bitter with sweet, and sweet with bitter. Well, now, my very believing friend, if I thought with you and your parson, if I felt convinced of a certainty that most of these people with whom I associate—my pals, my mates, my fellow-countrymen—were going to endure torment that surpasses all imagination, not for an hour, or a day, or a year, but for centuries and ages and epochs, forever and ever and ever, do you suppose I'd sit down quietly in a cozy parsonage and eat my beef and mutton, and swill my port-wine? Damme, no. I couldn't be so cold-blooded. I'd cry till the blood gushed out of my mouth. I'd take my stand on London Bridge, and collar every man and woman passing by and implore them to save themselves. I could not sleep; I could not eat. I should have such a job in hand as I dare not neglect for a second; and I should preach and preach and preach till I dropped,

or," he added, changing his earnest manner to a sardonic smile, "till some kind friend shut me up in an asylum as a raging lunatic."

This anti-climax produced a general titter, in which the speaker himself joined. Then he proceeded:

"Well, now, to ascend to common-sense, my friends, what's the conclusion you and I have to draw from this? Here's a doctrine that's calculated to make the dullest imagination shiver with horror. It's the most horrible conception that ever entered into the mind of man. It eclipses all the horrors that have been enacted on this planet since it came into being. And yet the teachers of that doctrine take it very easy, as if, after all, it didn't much matter. Now, men of Marymon, what say you? Don't you agree with me that these teachers, these black dragoons in the pay of the State, don't believe, can't believe what they are paid to teach? If they did believe, would they sit still in their jolly snug chimney-corners, or content themselves with prosing for a half hour once a week? Not they. And so, I say, let's make a clean sweep of them, along with the landlords and royalties and dukes, and all the shams that have been devised to repress the people. To do this you must first get your vote, and then use it. You will get it, for other people have labored to secure it for you; and if you don't use it when you have got it more fool you. I call on your friend and neighbor, Mr. Robert Hodge, laboring-man, to address the meeting."

All this while Plantagenet Marmyon had been standing amid the crowd, the observed of all observers, but perfectly impassive, at times smiling at Mr. Flaymar's impassioned periods, at times indulging in a slight grimace expressive of contempt. Being a head and shoulders above the mass of working-men around him, he was conscious of exercizing rather a paralyzing influence on the meeting. He knew most of the men by sight, not a few to speak to, and those whom he did not know fancied that he had his eye on them. Consequently, Mr. Flaymar was greeted with much less cheering than he had anticipated, and, indeed, his diatribe on the Church fell absolutely flat. No sooner, however, had Robert Hodge mounted the wagon in compliance with the invitation addressed to him than a storm of applause greeted him. The honest fellows considered it no sin to cheer to the echo one of themselves; and perhaps they were not a little reassured by the genial smile that overspread Plantagenet's broad, honest countenance as in the deep-chested voice of an athlete he vociferated, "Bravo, Hodge."

Robert Hodge faced his audience with calm self-confidence, perhaps with a sort of conscious superiority. His voice sounded singularly harmonious and tuneful after the rather rancorous tones of the professional agitator, the more so, perhaps, because he spoke quickly and easily.

"Friends and fellow-laborers," he said, "I interpret your sentiments when I thank the gentleman who has just addressed us for his eloquence and the zeal he has shown for our cause. For all that, I don't quite agree with much that he has urged—his entire programme, if I may so. I think, for instance, that he has been a trifle rough on the parson, who to my certain knowledge ain't much of a man for beef or mutton; and being a teetotaler, can't be rightly accused of a love of liquor; indeed, if you come to that, other people

like their liquor as well as parsons, and some of them like it a little too much. But when the gentleman spoke against landlords, then he and I were more at one. If I were the owner of these broad lands that go to form the Marmyon estate, I should be ashamed to see men and women toiling from year's end to year's end for my individual benefit, and I should say to them, 'My brethren, the age of selfishness has lasted long enough. The time has come for me to do an act of justice. You shall share the land, and I will take my portion as one of you.' That would be true nobility. That, I repeat, would be what I should do for the sake of conscience, of justice, and humanity, were I the possessor of that splendid heritage of Marmyon."

"Oh no, you wouldn't."

All eyes turned toward him who had given this flat contradiction to Robert Hodge. Most of them knew the voice. It was that of Plantagenet Marmyon.

A dead silence.

"If," said Hercules Flaymar, suddenly rising to his legs, "the individual who has just interrupted the speaker wishes to address us he shall have a fair hearing. We did not anticipate the honor of so very aristocratic, so very august, so very superlative a presence to grace our humble gathering, but—"

Mr. Hercules, however, had rather misjudged his man when he gave vent to this species of satire. Plantagenet Marmyon could not string together a dozen platitudes on any given theme—that everybody knew—but he could silence insolence in his own peculiar way, and he promptly proceeded to do so.

Before the orator of the Democratic Leverage Union could realize his position, he found himself suddenly collared by a giant arm, pushed backward through the crowd, which seemed afraid to interfere, and then, ere he could escape, he was twirled to the right-about, and a heavy boot kicked his devoted person over and over again as though he had been a football. This high-handed action, however, only succeeded owing to its suddenness; indeed, as soon as the men began to comprehend that their chief spokesman was being severely punished they made for Plantagenet, who after the first blow left Flaymar to moan on the turf, while he stood on the defensive, dealing knock-down blows right and left, as with a pole-ax, to his numerous assailants.

Quantity, however, in matters martial sometimes, as at Thermopylæ, though not at Rorke's Drift, overpowers quality. There could be no question about Plantagenet's capacity for bruising. He was in every sense a fighting-man, but he could not tackle three or four dozen stalwart young laborers, for all his agility and strength. In fact, Robert Hodge, his inferior physically in every particular, but his superior in brains, hung about him till the moment arrived when he was engaged with four at once. Then he cleverly dodged behind the big man and pinioned him, while those in front hammered him mercilessly. It was not fair play; it was not worthy of one who had just delivered himself of such large humanitarian sentiments. It was in truth the outcome of a spirit of hate and revenge that had been engendered in the young man's breast owing to Errol's interference with Polly—a spirit that caused him to in-

dulge his spleen indiscriminately, and to vent his direful vengeance on Plantagenet, simply because he bore the name of Marmyon.

At another time he would have been the first to cry shame, for in truth the spectacle was pitiful. There writhed the huge, brave fellow, unable to shake off Robert, who clung to his back like a cheetah, while the savages around dealt blows that laid bare his cheek and caused his teeth to rattle and his brain to reel. The Nemesis was cruel.

What would have happened to the heir of the ancient inheritance of Marmyon it would be impossible to predict. The Philistines were truly upon Samson. Fortunately, however, the noise and shrieks of a few women, who had come as spectators rather than listeners, arttracted the attention of Inspector Granden and his three constables, who were concealed in the back parlor of the Marmyon Arms, in case their presence should be desirable, and this small force of four resolute men, armed both with truncheons and authority, soon effected a diversion. Plantagenet's assailants disappeared, and Robert Hodge, springing agilely from his back, saw the big fellow stagger, totter, and fall prone at the inspector's feet. He was stunned, fearfully gashed, and his arm was broken above the elbow.

They carried him up to the Court, sent off a special messenger for the local doctor, poured brandy down his throat, and laid him on the sofa in terrible pain, and rather stupefied, yet, strange to say, by no means, as might have been expeced, in a blind rage.

"There!" fumed Sir Robert, furiously. "There is a specimen of your lovely lower orders. But, ha! ha! They shall smart for it. I'll turn every man jack out. There shall be a general clearance of every laborer on the Marmyon estate. Ha! ha! I'll make them repent! And as for the wretches who have all but assassinated poor Planny, I'll—"

"Father," murmured gigantic Plantagenet, "you'll do nothing of the kind. I was the aggressor. I kicked a London cad for his detestable impudence, and that began the row. I tell you, father, I owe a grudge to nobody except to the villain—whoever he was—who came behind and pinioned my arms. If I could find that fellow out, I'd—yes, by George—I'd be even with him."

"Tut, tut, boy, don't talk to me," continued Sir Robert. "What an awful sight you are, Planny! Egad, if you only saw yourself in the looking-glass you'd appreciate my feelings. You're marked for life by that vile *canaille*. Never mind, ha! ha! Never mind! We shall see—we shall see!"

"All right," rejoined Plantagenet, testily; "but if I don't mind, why should you? I swear there's only one man to blame—only one who ought to be trounced."

"And he," chimed in Errol, who had come to smirk at Planny's suffering, "is, so I'm told, Robert Hodge."

CHAPTER VI.

THE PLOT AGAINST PLANNY.

THE next day—and no wonder, after the alcohol they had administered—Plantagenet Marmyon was delirious. His arm was set

carefully and his face sewn up; but he could not sleep, and the result was high fever. His father wanted to telegraph for a London physician, but the local doctor protested that this was quite unnecessary, that there was no danger, and that the expense was quite useless. Sir Robert put the good man's asseveration down to the score of professional jealousy, which mental accusation was alike ungenerous and unfair, but he gave way.

To his mother's intense surprise, Errol evinced the liveliest interest in Plantagenet. His concern for that young combatant's calamities was, if not sincere, remarkably well enacted; and when at last he insisted on writing for Dr. Lembic from Oxford, Lady Marmyon expatiated loudly upon the beautiful disposition of her second son, which could bury animosities and display so much of heartfelt sympathy all in a moment.

Errol too, not only, to all appearances, exhibited a genuine anxiety on his brother's account, but also did his utmost to egg his splenetic sire on to vengeance. He had gathered from the remarks of one of Inspector Granden's policemen that Robert Hodge was the *causa causans* of Plantagenet's terrible pounding, and that but for Robert's vendetta his big brother would have been able, in all likelihood, to hold his own, or at all events would have fought his way free. Now Errol had no particular love for Robert Hodge. In his own sort of wicked, willful way he was half in love with pretty Polly Williams, and he knew well enough that in that quarter Robert barred his chances. Accordingly, he contrived to focus his father's wrath on Robert, with the result that Farmer Rodd received a missive requiring his instant dismissal, and Widow Gipps another to assure her that, if she did not at once eject from her domicile this offender against the dignity of the House of Marmyon, she herself would be relegated to the workhouse finally and irretrievably. Sir Robert, moreover, inwardly registered a vow to eject Martha Hodge from her tenancy of the Marmyon Arms; but he deemed it advisable to hold his hand, lest he should incur the suspicion of executing vengeance indiscriminately and inequitably on the unoffending, in the old Medo-Persic style.

Robert was not surprised when Mr. Rodd, with a long face, sent for him and told him flatly that he had quarreled with his bread-and-butter, and must go; "for," added the worthy farmer, "you can't expect I to split with my landlord all about a chap like you. 'Tain't loikely, Robert!"

Robert expected nothing of the kind, and said so. What he did anticipate was a warrant to appear before the magistrates, but this did not come. He perceived, however, from the mandate of Widow Gipps, that he was ostracized forever from Marmyon, and it was in the highest spirit of antagonism that he replied to it by taking up his quarters once more at the Marmyon Arms. He thought and talked of going to America—the laborers' universal alternative—but he would not go without Polly; and that estimable young woman was not only rather nettled with him for having incurred the heavy displeasure of the Court, but also avowed herself decidedly averse to the pleasure of sea-sickness and the experiment of foreign parts. Hence he adopted, against his will, the *rôle* of loafer, and waited for the unforeseen.

Mrs. Hodge was by no means pleased to have him back, and would have denied him shelter but for Belinda, who somehow cherished a sort of romantic fancy for him. Miss Belinda, moreover, was of the two rather the more omnipotent, being of an age when young females with a fine, growing taste for spirituous liquors usually begin to assert themselves; whereas Martha Hodge had grown far too obese to quarrel, except under extreme provocation. Hence Robert lodged himself beneath the roof of the Marmyon Arms, and Errol badgered his father to regard this as a *casus belli* and turn out Mrs. Hodge. Forty-eight hours, however, cooled Sir Robert, and he recollected even in his wrath that he owed something to the landlady of the Marmyon Arms. In short, he would not interfere, so his dutiful and affectionate son Errol changed his tactics.

He carefully watched his opportunity, and by occasionally strolling through the village, at last contrived to run against Polly Williams—alone. This was what he wanted, and he was not the sort of gentleman to be foiled if he had made up his mind for mischief.

"Polly," he said, eagerly, "don't take huff, there's a good soul, but I must say one word to you."

His tone was so decidedly unlover-like that the girl looked him straight in the eyes and paused involuntarily.

"It's only this. My brother Plantagenet owes your sweetheart Robert a tremendous grudge. You mayn't know, but I tell you it's the truth; and if you ask the men they will corroborate what I say, that the severe punishment Planny—my brother, that is to say—has received—and it's bad enough to render his life in danger—was all owing to Master Robert Hodge. He held him while the others hit him."

"I'm sure," gasped Polly, indignantly, "he never could have done such a thing. He's no coward."

"Ask others. Don't ask me. What I tell you is the fact, and I'm not saying a word against Robert. I don't love my brother enough for that! Indeed, I simply wish you to warn him, your sweetheart, that he had best be out of the way when Planny's about again, or, by Heaven, there'll be mischief. Planny will kill him, or, at all events, smash him to atoms!"

"Is that what you want to say, Mr. Errol?"

"That's it, and that's all. Good-day, Polly, and luck."

Polly remained rooted to the spot a long minute. She had heard what she did not relish, and hesitated how to act.

Her reverie was interrupted suddenly by no less a person than Miss Belinda, with the normal exclamation of young women with more tongue than brains, "Well, I never!"

Polly blushed, bit her lip, and looked silly.

Then Belinda laughed, for she had caught sight of the retreating form of Errol Marmyon, and when Polly began chattering about Widow Gipp's rheumatics she laughed even louder; and afterward, with the amiable design of teasing brother Robert, she bade that enamored swain have a care, or he would be cut out by Master Errol.

"What do you mean?" asked Robert, loftily.

"Nothing much; except that when two young people meet and stop to talk—" this with an air of profound mystery.

"Did they?"

"I see them with my very eyes."

Robert said nothing, but he registered a vow, then and there, not to go to America without Polly. He had pondered over the wisdom of securing employment in the States, and then sending for her; but this project now vanished into thin air. Indeed, he decided on no account to leave Marmyon unless under sheer compulsion, and even then not to go far afield.

The morrow changed the situation slightly, for, oddly enough, Errol called on Mrs. Hodge in the character of a candid friend, to warn her that by harboring Robert, who was justly an object of aversion to the Court, she was running a grave risk. He begged her, careful diplomatist as he was, on no account to mention him, but to use her own discretion and act *proprio motu*.

Martha Hodge opened her eyes wide, thanked her informant, and adopted his advice not only to the letter, but far beyond it, in the truest spirit of selfishness.

"Look'ee 'ere Robert," said she. "'Tis about time we two arrived at a h'understandin'. You've behaved downright bad to me. No, don't go to contradick, young man, for I won't hear you. Bad it is as you have behaved, and now you're a-tryin' to ruin me. I won't stand it, and if there ain't no law to pertect a widder I'll make one; so there!'

"What's up?" inquired Robert "You did not object to my coming back just for the time being, did you?"

"Because I didn't rightly understand the business. Because I didn't see that you'd have done that as have made you the powerfiest enemies. But no more 'umbug for me. If you stay in this 'ouse there'll be a change of license. Now!"

"Is that so?" asked Robert, simply.

"With Master Plantagenet almost a-dying all along of your wickedness, I wonder how you can have the face to ask such a question, Robert!"

Robert pondered. Then he put on his hat, lit a pipe, and departed without another word. His mother's logic was so far conclusive that it convinced him.

* * * * * * *

The day that Robert quitted the Marmyon Arms Dr. Lembic arrived from Oxford. Sir Robert welcomed him effusively; for although Plantagenet's delirium was over, he was still very ill indeed, and the baronet could not bring himself to confide in the local practitioner, albeit that humble but by no means unskillful disciple of Esculapius had done all that was possible for the patient.

Dr. Lembic, of course, came and examined Plantagenet, put him to some quite superfluous pain, and as he gazed upon his recumbent form, unconsciously copied the mental attitude of the butcher when examining a prize pig; in a word, he thought that the big man would cut up beautifully, if only he could get his operating-knife into him.

Next morning, to kill time before luncheon, and to insure an appetite for that repast, Errol took Dr. Lembic for a long walk round the woods. They were cronies rather than friends, Lembic, the elder by some years, affecting to patronize Errol, and Errol quietly letting the doctor understand that his social position was vastly superior to

that of an Oxford don. Nevertheless, in spite of the slight mutual jealousy, the pair fraternized. Both relished cruelty, and were endowed with that extra lust which impelled them to enjoy their bent to the utmost. Both were innately deceitful and intensely fond of money—a characteristic by no means inconsistent with that sanguinary spirit which takes a morbid delight in inflicting and witnessing agony. Lastly, both were at heart devil-worshipers, idolators of wickedness; albeit, in regard of morality, Dr. Lembic had always preserved his reputation. He was, indeed, rather a philosopher and a student than a sensualist, and his sublimest pleasure was the low moan of a gagged dog as the knife first laid bare its quivering flesh. He cherished an ambition, however, of a yet keener gratification, when he should be able—he knew not how—to dissect little by little, and without anæsthetics, some member of the human species. A disciple of the pious St. Dominic could not have built a more diabolical castle in the air. It was worthy of the inventor of the "Scavenger's Daughter."

The amiable pair talked of their favorite topic as they roamed through the lovely woods, insensible entirely to the divine fascination of nature, art, and sweetness. For them the note of the thrush meant nothing, and the bird itself was only a living thing that might be tortured. Their materialism had rendered them oblivious to the beauties of matter, and they cared for nothing but analysis. To pull to pieces, to wreck, to destroy—that was their mission, and next to mercy they ridiculed belief as the greatest folly of which the human mind is capable. They were, in truth, a brace of cultured monsters.

"The crass indifference to science of most English people, and particularly of those who call themselves educated, strikes me with amazement and disgust," began Dr. Lembic. "We are followed, checked, hampered at every turn, not only by Acts of Parliament, but by the inert force of public opinion and the irrelevant interference of the press. What is the result? We make little or no advance. Of course, in the hospitals, we have virtually *carte-blanche*, and we use it to the utmost of our ability, but here or elsewhere we are bound by the cords of prejudice. For instance, a man is brought in, some one of these tough laboring-men that make excellent subjects for experiments. Well, we've got him there, and, if it wasn't for a set of nursing Sisters and people who are half-hearted, we might use him as you and I use a dog. Instead of that we are perforce compelled to confine our experiments to the part affected, whatever it may be, and to effect a perfectly unnecessary cure, when we might add to our stock of positive knowledge by sacrificing the fellow's worthless life. It's simply detestable."

"But still," urged Errol, "you can, I imagine, experiment pretty freely, and, after all, you have lots of subjects—fresh relays, and without anything to pay, don't you know."

Dr. Lembic laughed sardonically. "Yes," said he, "there's nothing to pay, and of course when a case is entered as hopeless we have a certain latitude allowed us. But personally, I don't care for moribund subjects. Give me a healthy subject with an acute sense of pain!"

"But," continued Errol, "the profession, or rather, I should say

the physiologists, are not confined to the hospitals. They have their private patients."

"Yes, my dear sir, but private patients presumably pay, and it will never do to cause them a second's suffering. A man would lose his patients *en bloc* if it was so much as whispered that he regarded them as subjects. No, I fear that we are still a long way off from that halcyon period when the human subject will be as easily obtainable for experiment as the dog is now. But perhaps, as religious superstition dies out by degrees, and science is more largely appreciated, we may be able to induce the Legislature to hand over to us physiologists for use murderers under sentence of death. There is no slushy sentimentality in favor of such offenders as Rush or Palmer or Pearce—in fact, society would rather gloat over a special report of their piled-up agonies—ha! ha!"

"It would be magnificent fun," remarked Errol; adding, "By Jove, how warm the sun is! Suppose we sit down for a few minutes. Let me offer you a cigar. These are Bacon's best."

They had just reached the side of one of those thatched sort of shanties used in the Kentish woods by charcoal burners; and as a log lay against it, and the side of the shanty afforded a sort of back, they lolled at their ease, discussing Errol's very perfect cigars—an Oxford brand of a decidedly full flavor.

"What's your opinion, doctor, of Planny?" asked Errol, after a long pause with sudden emphasis.

Puff—puff! "Oh, all right; bovine young man!"

"You don't mean that? Just like my infernal luck!"

Dr. Lembic took his cigar out of his mouth, turned round, and looked his companion straight in the face.

"I see," he said.

Errol grinned strangely. "Yes," he replied, "that would be a blind eye which failed to review this situation."

"Hum! Yes! The estate, I suppose, is entailed on this big brute Planny, and if he went you come in. *Ergo*, it would be advantageous if he could be got to retire from this sublunary scene, to which he is an incubus rather than an ornament."

"Precisely so. And that is the reason why I wired for you."

Dr. Lembic started; indeed, he dropped his cigar.

"You see," muttered Errol, looking round rather nervously, as though the beech and the oak trees regarded him as a sort of criminal Orpheus, and had taken to listening—"you see, my friend, there's more ways than one of hanging a dog. Planny was delirious two days ago. That meant fever. Now, fever may be intermittent. It may return after many hours of absolute repose. It might return, might it not, in his case?"

"It might turn to typhoid," smiled Dr. Lembic, mysteriously.

"And," observed Errol, "typhoid is a perfectly natural and normal exit from this wicked world."

"Oh, yes, most proper, most convenient."

"Then, doctor, why not try how far Planny's bovine constitution, weakened as it must be by his illness, could bear up against typhoid?"

"Bear up? Absurd! It should not bear up if I meant it to bear down, my boy. But before we go further let us understand each

other. This arrangement would largely benefit you; but as regards myself?" and he puffed a big whiff.

"I'm open to meet you like a friend, on the most liberal terms. In fact, you've only got to say what you want."

"Oh, no! The offer must come from your side."

"That's awkward. All I can say is, that if what I suggest does not meet your views, say so. I thought, doctor, one year's income of the estate—that is, £15,000."

Dr. Lembic smiled.

"£15,000," he echoed. "Well, under existing circumstances, your brother would marry, and—"

"Marry!" hissed Errol. "Yes. I owe him one for that. The low rascal has stolen my girl—bless him."

"Not Miss Ida?"

"Yes."

"Then, *certes*, Errol, you have cause enough to wish for a large Nemesis. Miss Ida is as lovely a piece of goods as I've seen for many a long year; in fact I should like to vivisect her."

"Oh, ah!" grunted Errol, by no means charmed at this *mauvaise plaisanterie;* "but to return to business. I said £15,000."

"And I," coolly retorted Dr. Lembic, "beg to state I don't consider that by any means a magnificent recompense for a service which involves some little difficulty."

"£30,000, then? Come."

"Let me calculate. If the property is worth fifteen thousand a year net, exclusive of the house and grounds, which I should certainly value at another thousand, that at three per cent represents half a million, doesn't it?"

"Yes; but my father may live another thirty years."

"Or barely thirty weeks."

"Well, no, I don't care about getting rid of my poor old dad. He and I differ at times, but there's a certain sympathy between us; whereas Planny and I are antipathies, so much so that at times I could take my oath he's no blood-relation of mine. Flatly, I could not touch a hair of my father's head. I am no sentimentalist, but I should feel uncomfortable if I did that. He is my friend, and I've not yet come down to injuring my friends."

Dr. Lembic shrugged his shoulders. "Very dutiful, I'm sure, and most Christian on your part. However, to cut it short, I should imagine you could borrow easily, say a hundred thousand on your reversion, if you were heir under the entail. Let us take that as the basis."

"Well?"

"Now as to the *modus operandi.* Typhoid germs have to be procured first, then introduced into the patient's system—all the easier when he is in a febrile condition—and I'll give him something to augment the existing fever, and then, so to speak, he will have to be fed by careful treatment. I shall first have to run up to town, in order to arrange for the importation of the germs, and to bring down the drugs to aggravate the disease when once it is introduced into the blood. I will bring back with me ten promissory notes of £5,000 each. These you will sign. Should Planny survive they will be waste-paper, and I will return them to you. Should the treatment

succeed, I shall expect you to honor them within three months of your stepping into his shoes. Does that meet your views?"

"Yes," replied Errol, reflectively, "that will do. Yes. Have another cigar, and then we'd better be thinking about lunch. It's a good half-hour's walk from here to the Court, and the governor is abominably punctual about feeding—always puts his old head in the manger at precisely the same hour day after day."

Dr. Lembic rose and stretched his limbs, yawning, with the cool indifference of a man who had been conversing on the most ordinary and commonplace of topics, instead of one involving life and death. He valued, in truth, life, whether in man or in the lower creatures, as an abstract consideration—much as the rest of us value the life of a flower, a vegetable, or a tree. In other words, he would take it or leave it alone, just according as it suited his interest or caprice. Errol, though anxious enough to sacrifice his brother, whom he hated, could not bring himself to send his father out of the world prematurely. Dr. Lembic, however, was more philosophically callous. He would with calm indifference offer up on the altar of science or selfishness the mother who bore him or the wife of his bosom, if he had happened to have one. He would have cheerfully vivisected a girl whom he admired in his soul to the verge of adoration; in short, he resembled nothing in history so much as those Oriental kings who laid the foundations of new cities on the corpses of their own sons whom they had butchered for that end.

As they were about to move, a *beau rêve* occurred to the doctor and he pulled up sharp, and stared his companion in the face.

"By the bye," he said, "suppose I remain here with Planny and send you to town for the typhoid germs and the bills?"

Errol paled.

"But," he protested, "I—I might catch the infection. I don't mind going to town; indeed, I'd rather be out of the way; but, you see, I'm rather inexperienced in dealing with infectious diseases, and something serious might happen to me."

The doctor burst into an uncontrollable torrent of laughter.

"Good—very good!" he exclaimed. "So I'm to earn the money, am I, friend Errol? Well, so be it; only I did not give you credit for being afflicted with nerves. Afraid of poetical justice, Divine Nemesis, the biter being bit, eh? Bah! you're only half a scientist after all."

"Come along. I tell you we shall be late for luncheon," was all Errol could rejoin. There was something withering in the sarcasm of this cynical, stony-hearted, reckless inquisitor, who had so fascinated him, and it caused him to wince and bite his lip.

And so the pair moved rapidly away, down, and yet further down the steep slope of the chalk-hill, Dr. Lembic sneering at the law which could hang a man for giving his fellow-creature a pinch of arsenic, strychnia, or prussic acid, and could detect ever so subtle a poison as aconitine or antimony, yet failed to bring men to justice for the parallel offense of communicating a deadly disease with intent that it should cause death; and this impotency of the law of the land, which seems always to presume that infection is administered by sheer accident, caused the man of science to laugh merrily till the

ancient hills echoed again and again to the peals which sounded eldritch indeed, the mirth of malevolence.

Perhaps he would have been less disposed to indulge in this unearthly explosion of laughter had he for a second turned his head over his shoulder. The oaks had not been eavesdroppers, neither had the beeches nor the yews; nevertheless, all this conversation, all this coldly brutal bargain of blood had been overheard.

Robert Hodge, not having a lodging, and being loath, as lovers will be ever, to part from the girl of his heart when his assumed rival was on the spot, instead of marching overnight to the next town —a decayed coaching stoppage named Frampingham—remarked that the wind was south, and so toiled up to the shanty, lit a fire for himself, and slept under the thatch beneath a pile of brushwood. He had taken with him his rude breakfast, and, after partaking of it, lay down beneath the brushwood to sleep or think, as might be; and thus it chanced, as by a miracle, that his ear was within a foot of Errol's elbow as he sat on that log and divulged the plot he had concocted to Dr. Lembic, receiving in return the pledge of that disinterested friend of his.

Robert stole forth stealthily to watch the retreating forms and satisfy himself that he was not mistaken in the voices, one of which was familiar enough to him; the other that of a stranger of whom he had heard mention in the gossip of the village.

"Ha!" he soliloquized, "the Book is not far wrong when it says that the love of money is the root of all evil. To think of these two being up to that game! A nice pair of demons they are, and this is what comes of education and all that. Yes, education would be good if we were all equal; but, hold, what is this that flashes across my mind? Why, by all that's hideous, if Master Plantagenet should die, they'll bring me in guilty of manslaughter! Yes. And so I'm bound to act, and act at once. But how?"

CHAPTER VII.

TOO LATE.

WHILE Errol and Dr. Lembic were enjoying their charming morning walk, Sir Robert Marmyon felt it incumbent upon him, as an affectionate father, to take his seat by his heir's bedside. Thanks to the local doctor, Plantagenet was slowly improving, but his visage was so cut about as to be quite ghastly, and a broken arm added to his misery not a little. The fever, however, was gone, and the big fellow's head cool; indeed he wished to get up, but yielded to his sire's urgent solicitations to remain quiet till he had received the permit of medical authority.

"I hope," prosed Sir Robert, "this will be a warning to you never to meddle or mix with the infernal people. My dear fellow, we hate them and they us. We feast while they fast, and we are free while they are slaves. There's no nonsense about me, Planny. I'm a Tory. I will always do my duty to the people as becomes a Christian gentleman, but the further they are off me the better I'm pleased. Their ways are abhorrent to my notions. There's a feel-

ance Dr. Lembic will voluntarily retire from the case. That, I assure you, is a matter of strict professional etiquette."

"Oh!" ejaculated Martha, dubiously. "Then would you object to my nussing of the poor feller? I don't wish for no sellery."

"You must not ask that. Lady Marmyon is her son's proper and only nurse at this terrible crisis."

"Lady Marmyon didn't nuss him as a hinfant!" whimpered Martha.

"Now, now," cried Sir Robert, "do be a reasonable woman! I'm trying to meet your wishes to the utmost of my ability, and I'll do more, if you'll promise me to keep quiet, and, above all things, not divulge your secret to a soul. I'll do this, Mrs. Hodge. I'll institute privately such inquiries as shall test the accuracy of your son Robert's accusations against Errol and Dr. Lembic, and if I find out these true, it will be the worse for both. That I swear!"

This last word, having in it the sort of energy which appeals to a public-house intelligence, quite hoodwinked Mrs. Hodge. Her face beamed superbly as she grasped Sir Robert's hand with the assurance,

"I know'd you'd do right! I know'd you was a honorable gentleman. You're not the man, I feel sure, to leave your first-born to the mussy of mudderers. God bless 'ee, Sir Robert, and oh! if the poor dear bo-oy as was mine to love and cherish in his childhood be spared—there, I 'most thinks I could give up the public-'us and take to the teetotals for joy and gratertude."

And thus the interview ended, but its results were far-reaching. Sir Robert, with his high sense of honor, and his naturally unsuspicious nature, at the outset mentally rejected the bare notice of villainy on the part of either Errol or Dr. Lembic; but when Mrs. Hodge had waddled herself away to the Marmyon Arms, and he sat down to reflect coolly on her revelation, he could not conceal from himself that it was though improbable not impossible; also, that while it would be virtually unverifiable in either event, it might be absolute truth. Certainly Robert's manner, when before him as magistrate, gave a color to it, so did Mrs. Hodge's violence; and the only consideration on the other side was the advantage that Robert might have hoped to derive by trumping up this tale. This latter suspicion, however, was hardly on all-fours with Robert's conduct in seeking him out at a moment when he was quite in ignorance of the fact that he was wanted by the police. In short, Sir Robert was oppressed by a mental incubus. Feeling that he ought to act with vigor and promptitude, his mind, notwithstanding, was irresolute, and his judgment paralyzed.

He did, however, wire for Dr. Shadfort, who came down by the next train, examined the patient, prescribed for him, and complicated the situation not a little by congratulating Lady Marmyon on having on the spot so able and earnest a physician as Dr. Lembic.

Then he left, without expressing an opinion. He promised, however, in accordance with Sir Robert's reiterated request, to run down as early as possible the next morning.

After dinner the baronet summoned Errol into the library.

"Planny is dangerously ill," was his opening remark.

"Oh," replied the young man, jauntily, "no fear, he'll pull through. Confound him, he always had luck on his side."

"Indeed! I don't agree with you."

A pause—Errol waiting to ascertain his sire's pleasure.

"Errol," remarked Sir Robert, nervously, "if anything happened to Planny, you would be my heir. In that case it would be a crushing misfortune for you if any suspicious circumstances environed poor Planny's departure from this world."

And he fixed his eye full on the young man before him.

A thrill, like a spasm, shook Errol's frame, his mouth twitched, his lips blanched; but he replied, quite carelessly, "I don't quite comprehend your drift, father."

"I will be candid; but first I must have your solemn assurance that what passes within these four walls is not to be repeated under any pretext to a living soul."

Errol bowed his acquiescence, and Sir Robert proceeded:

"Up to the very hour of your friend Dr. Lembic's return from his sudden and inexplicable excursion to London, Planny was becoming rapidly and satisfactorily convalescent. True, his arm was only just set, and his face is very grievously disfigured; but he had no fever about him, still less typhoid."

"You don't mean to insinuate that Lembic's given him typhoid? because if that's what you're driving at, it's more than I can stand."

"Eh, what? Don't hector, don't menace me. Flatly, you have anticipated my meaning, and I speak, not on a presumption, but on evidence—yes, evidence, I am horrified to say, Errol."

If he wanted further evidence, he had only to look at the trembling, guilty countenance before him. Errol's braggadocio vanished, like a vapor in the sun, under the influence of plain words, and Sir Robert was certified of a truth he wished with all his heart to disbelieve.

"Have you nothing to say, Errol?"

"Nun—nothing," gasped his son, in a ghastly tone, adding, "except this—except this: if you have your suspicions, why don't you accuse Lembic?"

"Because, Errol, if I accuse Lembic, I accuse my own son."

Silence.

Errol's breath came short and sharp. He could not utter a word, though he tried to, and his eye quailed under that of his father.

At last Sir Robert spoke in a low, melancholy voice: "What has been the cause of this I can not divine. It may be covetousness, jealousy on account of Ida Frankalmoign, or simple hate—the hate of Cain for Abel. I have to deal with fact, and, alas! Errol, *known* fact—fact revealed to me by an influence remote from our circle! I gave that assertion of fact the lie direct. I acted as though it was necessarily false. But I can not go further to shield criminality, though, Heaven knows, I would perish rather than that my name, our ancient and glorious name, should suffer such disgrace. There may be yet time to avert consequences which, I warn you, would imperil your life, Errol. Go! Tell Dr. Lembic to leave this house at once. If he asks questions, refuse to answer. But go he shall and must, this very minute. Now, Errol, will you obey me?"

"I will obey you to the letter, father."

pigeon-pie, pancakes, and cheese, and old ale—a modest, maidenly dinner. At last she came.

"You're ill and faint," she said. "Have a bite or a sup, do. It vexes I, Robert, to see you so down. Of course you done wrong, there ain't no doubt of that; but it were all along of that Errol, I knows, as made yer wild with jealousy. Ah, he be a bad lot, he be. Came here yesterday and poisoned mother's mind agen you. That he did. Mother would never have been that nasty if Errol hadn't gone and terrified 'er with believin' that Sir Robert 'ud turn 'er out if so be as she didn't turn yer out."

"Oh," remarked Robert, opening very wide his fine hazel eyes. "So that's it, is it? I am indebted to Mr. Errol Marmyon for that good turn. Well, perhaps, I may do as much for him, and more." Whereupon in the fewest words Robert narrated his adventure in the charcoal shanty, and the plot there concocted by Errol and Dr. Lembic.

Belinda's face expressed more than amazement at this startling recital. "Why, 'tis murder!" she whispered, timidly.

"Or will be if I don't prevent it," said Robert, his countenance twitching nervously, for he felt the gravity of the situation.

"Are you sure you haven't been dreamin' all this yere?" hesitatingly inquired Belinda, with a side glance at his rough and dirty appearance.

"I'll take my solemn oath I have spoken the truth."

Belinda reflected. She had a shrewd head of her own, with at times a shrewish tongue to match; not, however, for Robert. He was very much her *beau ideal* of what masculine humanity ought to be, and she often was wont to aver that one with such a refined appearance, and frank yet polished manners, ought to have been a gentleman, let alone his talent—a quality which in the village, where brains were scarce, had been not a little exaggerated by appreciative rustic simplicity.

At last she said, quietly, "I don't see my way clear. If so be as you did the straight thing, and went to Sir Robert with the same tale you've just told, d'ye think he'd believe you? Not he, Robert. He'd say you're in disgrace for being concerned in damaging the body of his eldest son, and now you want to blast the character of the other one. In fact he might cut up nasty and send you to Maidstone jail for slander."

"That's so," rejoined Robert, "but it don't set me forwarder."

"Suppose I has a word with mother," suggested Belinda, who really looked, as she felt, overburdened with embarrassment, and desirous of shifting the responsibility.

"As you will," he replied, indifferently, being a skeptic in regard of Martha Hodge's capacity for anything except nips of raw spirit. "As you will; but all I know is that if I didn't repent of having let in Master Plantagenet for that heavy hammering, I'd hold my tongue till the mischief was done, and then inform against Errol and that villain of a doctor. It would serve the beggar right for interfering with my Polly."

"Nonsense!" muttered Belinda; "that would never do. I'll speak to mother, and be back in a minute or two."

The minute or two proved to be a quarter of an hour, at the ex-

piration whereof Belinda returned with a message to the effect that mother wanted to speak to him "very pertickler."

At another time he would not have obeyed Martha Hodge's behest, especially after experiencing the rough side of her tongue. Now, however, he was anxious, he was apprehensive, and greedy for some sort of sympathetic advice.

He found Martha in the back parlor, alone, Belinda having been told off to mind the bar; and for prudence' sake he shut the communicating door and faced the red-cheeked woman, who, strange to say, was sobbing vehemently.

"I are sorry, I are, Robert, as I spoke to you so unkind; but I have my own troubles, and they gets the better of my temper at times. Have a drop of something."

"No, nothing."

"But you looks white and tired like. Here, try this."

"No. I have not come here to drink, but to consult. What is best to be done, d'ye think?"

"Lawk a mussy, Robert, it do completely upset I. That there dear young feller, Plantagenet, as I nussed with my own bussom—"

"Ye—es," interrupted Robert, who had two opinions about the merit, from a natural point of view, of that performance.

"To think," whimpered she, "of his being done to death by that there willain of a H'errol. But it sha'n't be. No; that it sha'n't. You go and face Sir Robert, my bo—oy, and if that don't do, I'll face him. If you can't force him to protect his own—the poor sick feller, as was handled bad enough by you, Robert, and you oughter to be ashamed of the deed—perhaps Martha Hodge can. Now go."

"But," observed Robert, coolly, "Sir Robert will denounce me as a spy, a liar, and a double-dyed scoundrel. In a moment of passion at seeing my mates so knocked about by that big bully I helped to punish him, and that will render my testimony unworthy of credit."

"Mayhap it will," replied Martha, sententiously. "But if you don't speak first, Robert, I can't speak second. So, again I say go, and don't delay, or the poor boy will be on the high-road to certain death. You will go, Robert, won't 'ee?"

Never in his life had Robert heard that mother of his speak in so tender a tone. What could account for the immense and overpowering interest this selfish, sottish, stupid woman seemed to take in Plantagenet? Nursing, so he began to opine, must be of the nature of a natural tie.

Leisurely, lazily indeed, he lounged out of the Marmyon Arms, and, with slow steps, wended his way up the long avenue to the Court. Of course he went round to the back door, and was rather chagrined to find himself received with a coldness amounting to dislike by his old friends, the servants. They too, apparently, were devoted to Plantagenet with all the irrational loyalty of Martha Hodge.

"Want to see master?" said the flunkey, superbly. "Well, you don't expect me to take in that message, do yer? Guess you'll have an interview with Sir Robert sooner than you expect or like, my gay young feller!"

"If you don't give my message to Sir Robert and say that I must

see him on a matter of life and death, I'll walk straight into the drawing-room. Now, my lad."

"Oh no, you won't."

"Don't try me. I'm not here on a fool's errand. I tell you I must and will see Sir Robert. Every minute's of importance."

The flunkey looked him up and down, whistled, and retired; then Robert sat down in the porch to wait.

Presently a rather more friendly face appeared. It was that of Hester Mazebrook, and it looked perturbed—very.

"What do you want here, Robert?' she whispered, hurriedly. "You must be daft to run your head into the lion's den. Why don't you make a clean bolt of it before the police catches you?"

"Police, Mrs. Mazebrook!"

"Don't you know as there's a warrant or something out again you for hurting Mr. Plantagenet? I heard tell as you was to be brought up before Sir Robert this afternoon."

Mrs. Mazebrook, this is news—bad news. But that does not signify. I want a few words in secret with Sir Robert. Can't you contrive that for me? It is most important, far more so than my personal liberty. It is, indeed."

Hester, never very perceptive, could not grasp anything so mysterious; so she shook her head and shut her eyes.

"If I were to tell you, as a great secret, that the life of Mr. Plantagenet depends upon it?"

Then she opened her eyes.

"What!" she cried, "is there a wicked conspiracy, then, among your agitators, to kill the pore young gentleman? Oh, Robert, Robert! how can you mix yourself with such 'orrible, 'ateful people?"

"You're wrong," he replied, with dignity; "do as I ask at once."

But Hester Mazebrook turned away, and in another second the flunkey returned with a message to the effect that Sir Robert Marmyon declined to hold any communication with Robert Hodge, who was wanted by the police.

Robert turned deadly pale, and his mouth showed how profoundly he felt his position. He was about to move awaywith the design of warning Martha Hodge of his total failure, when he observed approaching the door no less a personage than Mr. Inspector Granden with a biggish myrmidon. In a second he was captured, and taken into the justice-room before Sir Robert.

The charge was made, the policeman being witness, and after a few depositions had been entered, the baronet asked it he had anything to say in response to the charge.

"Sir Robert," he replied, with profound emotion, "I have much to say, and for pity's sake, for your sake more than my own, I implore you to grant me a private hearing. I pledge you my sacred word that what I have to confide could not be uttered before a soul in this wide world, save yourself, and, to prove my sincerity, I here solemnly declare that I am bitterly sorry at having been the cause of your son's misfortune. Sir Robert, it is for his sake I beg a private interview. You have known me from my infancy. My mother was your son's foster-mother. You will not, Sir Robert, refuse me? For your son's sake, Sir Robert!"

There was passion and pathos in this, and both were intensified by the tears that coursed down the young man's cheeks. Sir Robert himself was moved, but he had his own preconceived notions, and regarded this emotion merely in the light of so much futile penitence, the grief which is never so intense as when on the eve of meeting with the reward of its evil deeds.

"I am sorry for your sad position, Robert Hodge. I am very sorry. But I have a duty to perform to society as a magistrate, as well as in the capacity of a father. I cannot permit you to try and work upon my feelings so as to defeat the ends of justice. That, you know, Robert, is your motive."

"It is not—it is not!" he shouted, hysterically.

"Then I cannot divine it, neither do I desire to do so."

Robert's countenance changed at this. He perceived that his appeal was rejected, and pride caused his bosom to swell. "Very well," he muttered between his teeth, adding "your blood be upon your own head. You are acting, in your blind suspicion the part of a madman. Enough, I am ready, inspector, to go to jail. I have done my best. Heaven knows."

* * * * * * *

"It's a very odd thing, Belinda, that our Robert don't come back from the Court. Here it's arter tea-time ever so long, and Sir Robert's about agoing to dinner. What can keep the feller? He ain't likely to stop and drink."

"It are odd," responded Miss Belinda, in a tone of extreme dubiety.

"And the wust is," continued Mrs. Hodge, "the hagertation do bring on these yere hoffal spazzums. Another drop of brandy, Belinda, if you—hic—loves I, and—hic—a drop of laudanum in it. What I suffers h'angels n'only knows."

Belinda impatiently handed her mother the two perilous fluids; for there happened to be a call for a pot in the bar, and customers requiring pots will not wait. They are too important.

Mrs. Hodge accordingly, who had been doctoring these spasms all the afternoon, helped herself, tasted the liquid, and remarking, "blest if I ain't forgot the laudanum," took a double dose of that soporific. Then she laid down on the sofa, and in ten minutes was so sound asleep that her daughter could not have awakened her had she been so disposed, which assuredly was not the case.

And so Belinda went on her routine duty, chattering, chaffing, serving, and taking money—for since the political meeting religion had rather waned, and trade had waxed in proportion—until closing hours, when she suddenly recollected that there was no Robert on the premises.

She was just about to wish the last sot, who adhered to his seat like a limpet, good-night, when in rushed, with pallid lips, Polly Williams. Something evidently was wrong.

"Why, what?"

"Haven't you heard the dreffful news?" sobbed the pretty girl, "Robert's took to Maidstone!"

"Never!" gasped Belinda; "and mother in such a state! What is to be done?"

Echo answered "what?"

"Look here, Polly. They don't go to bed at the Court till midnight. Run up, there's a good child, and find out if the strange doctor from Oxford left to-day, and if he's expected back."

Polly did as she was bid, and brought back tidings that Dr. Lembic went to town after luncheon, and returned after dinner.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT IS TYPHOID.

MARTHA HODGE'S physical and mental condition the following morning can better be imagined than described. She could only groan, and bewail her wracking head; and it was not until the afternoon that she contrived to dress and appear down-stairs—a warning indeed to all her victims against the habit whereof she was now the abject slave as well as the apostle.

Then she first learned from her daughter the situation. Robert in durance vile at Maidstone, Dr. Lembic returned from his visit to town, in exact accordance with the anticipations of Robert, and nothing known in the village concerning Plantagenet Marmyon's condition.

"Send to the Court and ask how the young man is!" such was Mrs. Hodge's mandate, delivered imperiously.

The response was, "No worse. If anything, rather better. Dr. Lembic in constant attendance. Local doctor not required till the day after to-morrow."

Martha Hodge pressed her raging forehead as she tried to listen attentively. Then she repeated each item of the bulletin carefully. "No worse, and rather better. That's good. No harm done yet. Dr. Lembic in constant attendance. That's bad. Local man not needed. That's worse. Well, Belinda, if so be as I feels better by five o'clock, I'll take your arm up to the Court. Give me a drop, please. There's nothing for this complaint like 'the hair of the dog that bit one.' 'Tis a sovereign remedy."

The "hair" had its effect. By five o'clock Mrs. Hodge was drowsy and forgetful. Even in a matter of life and death, drink overrode every consideration, besides which she had been reared in the old rural principle never to do to-day what can be done to-morrow.

But on the morrow there came this line from Maidstone Jail: "If you've neglected to see Sir Robert, I won't be answerable for what happens:" and this aroused the insensate inebriate to action—at last.

She waddled up to the Court, and oh, what a change was there between Martha, the village beauty, who came to nurse the heir of Marmyon, and this bloated female with her puffy crimson cheeks, her dropsical limbs, thick throat, and rough voice! Sir Robert himself, who—needless to add—never crossed the evil threshold of the Marmyon Arms, hardly recognized her.

"Well, Mrs. Hodge, and so you want to see me. Then you must be very quick, please, for we are all in grievous trouble here. Thanks to that precious son of yours, my dear boy, Plantagenet, has that which I fear will bring sorrow and mourning into this house, Mrs. Hodge—sorrow and mourning!"

Martha winced, and her lip quivered. Then she walked up to Sir Robert and, with unwonted familiarity, laid her fat hand on his shoulder.

"Do you tell me he's got typhoid?"

"I—I—I n'never mentioned the word typhoid, woman"—this not only curtly but angrily. "What do you mean?"

She looked at him steadily, and with an expression of countenance that, if mysterious, was certainly not unintelligent.

"I mean typhoid," she replied, with emphasis: "I'll tell you the why and wherefore anon. But just answer me this: did you hear what our Robert had to tell ye?"

"Not I."

"And Mr. Plantagenet is worse, ever so much, and Dr. Lembic's got him in hand, and—" A flood of hysterical sobs, and an avalanche of tears.

"Pshaw!" murmured Sir Robert, testily; "what's the good of all this? I really cannot waste time on you now, Mrs. Hodge. I'm too anxious—far too anxious!"

"Sir Robert," she cried, for he was moving toward the door—"Sir Robert, you must hear, come what may. Your son Plantagenet's being murdered, ay, murdered, man!"

"Woman!"

The look of Sir Robert's face was that of one who had been wantonly and wickedly injured and insulted. He broke from her there and then, and was about to order her to be put out of the Court by force, when, to his horror, she sprung upon him, gripped his coat, and with flaming eyes hissed forth, "You shall not go till you have heard all! You must hear it sooner or later. Hear it now, before it's quite too late, for my sake, for Mr. Plantagenet's sake, *dear, dear* Sir Robert!"

Was the woman drunk, mad, what? No, it was only half-past ten in the morning, and she was sober, and, except for her intense emotion, sane. Sir Robert's quick perception told him that even if it were a cock-and-bull tale, a figment of the imagination, he must listen; so he placed her quietly in a chair beside him, closed the door, folded his hands and said, "I will hear you attentively, Mrs. Hodge. Pray collect yourself, and be careful what you say."

And he did listen to every syllable she had to pour into his ear, and when she ended, paused for a moment before speaking. The revelation staggered him.

At last, he said, quietly, "You don't expect me to believe this?"

"But I do expect you to believe it!" she rejoined, catching up his words angrily and impatiently.

"This," continued the baronet, "strikes me as being a clever excuse on the part of Robert to evade justice, but—"

"No, Sir Robert. Don't delude yourself. It is not Robert that has had the courage to speak out. He might have told you the truth right in front of the inspector, but he didn't. When you refused to hear, he shut his stupid mouth like an obstinate, reckless, ill-conditioned brute. No. It's Martha Hodge, the woman as gave her breastis to the fine young man as is lying between life and death upstairs, as is here to give you warning. As for Robert, punish him. Give it to the fellow hot and strong, Sir Robert. Give 'im a

twelvemonth at the tread-mill, for all I cares. 'Twill do him a sight of good, take down his pride, and knock the nonsense out of his head. It's Master Plantagenet, as I am a-thinkin' of, Sir Robert; for his dear sake, don't 'ee let that devil Lembic be about him. You send for the London doctor, and I'll bless you—for evermore—I will—"

And then, incredible as it may appear, Martha Hodge, with streaming eyes, seized the baronet's hand and kissed it.

Sir Robert indeed would have been opinionated and insensate had he quite ignored this ebullition of feeling. It was real beyond a doubt, yet somehow he could not shake off the impression that Robert Hodge, clever fellow as he indisputably was, had fudged up this story for his own benefit; so he replied in a very gentle yet firm tone, "My dear Mrs. Hodge, pray don't imagine I question your sincerity, but you will pardon my saying that I really believe you have been misinformed. You are, if you understand my meaning, the honest victim of an illusion."

Martha stared at him stonily and stupidly. Her apprehension, as in the case with middle-aged females addicted to fuddling, was exceedingly tardy. At last, however, she grasped his meaning, and then the natural answer rose to the top of her tongue.

"You it is, Sir Robert, as is mistook, not me. Robert came to me the arternoon before last, and he says, says he, that there Lembic's going to London to bring down they there typhoid germs whereby he says Master Plantagenet is to be tooked with—the deadly fever, he says. Now am I right or am I wrong? Did this Lembic go to London sudden that very day?"

"Yes. That is clear enough. Also that your son may have overheard some sort of conversation between my son Errol and the doctor in which the latter may have announced his intention to run up to town. That, however, Mrs. Hodge, proves nothing—at all events to my mind."

Again Martha's visage wore the dull look of one stupefied; but again also it lightened up, for she replied to the baronet's logic with simple force, "Yes. But the poor fellow were getting better. Mrs. Mazebrook told I so only five minutes ago, until that Lembic come back from London, and now he's down for good and all! He's bein' murdered, he is."

And the tears flowed afresh with yet intenser bitterness.

Sir Robert was for the nonce staggered. This rough juxtaposition of two and two quite posed him. He could not answer her anyhow on the lines of logic, yet he declined to admit her accusation.

"You've done your duty, Mrs. Hodge," he faltered, rather foolishly, for his dignity would not rise quite to the occasion; "and none of us can do more. What you have confided to me shall be carefully considered, and I promise you it will stimulate me to—to—keep my weather eye open, Mrs. Hodge."

"Yes," rejoined she, "but that's not satisfactory. If you won't save your son Plantagenet, I give you fair warning, Sir Robert Marmyon, I will—if 'taint too late."

"You?"

"Yes, me! Me, Martha Hodge, as nursed that blessed bo-oy with

my body. I'm in earnest, and I tell you this flat, Sir Robert, either you bundle that there Lembic and your wicked son Errol out of your house, and bring down that London doctor—what's his name—or I go straight to Maidstone and lay an information against that precious pair for conspiracy to murder."

"Mrs. Hodge!"

"Ay, ay, Sir Robert, you can't rightly judge the stuff I'm made of. You think because you're my landlord, and have been my patron and all that, you think I'm bound at this moment to knuckle under to you, and see that poor dear thing perish, and your precious son Errol seize upon his inheritance. That's what you thinks, but you are mistook, Sir Robert, you are! I'm desperate. In fact, I wants to nuss the poor chap myself."

"I think you're beside yourself," retorted Sir Robert, weakly. "I think you are forgetting what is due to yourself, if not to me. I think you are running a fine chance of ending your days in the workhouse, Mrs. Hodge."

And the baronet uttered this threat with determination.

"Very good!" replied Mrs. Hodge. "Then my word's my bond, Sir Robert. By the next train I goes to Maidstone."

There was no mistaking this. The woman meant mischief. Her resolve might be read in every line of her impurpled visage. It was all very irrational on her part; still, the action she proposed to take would involve difficulty, if not disgrace, and in the event of Plantagenet succumbing, would place a lasting stigma upon Errol. Evidently it was policy to temporize with the beldam, who had got the bit between her teeth.

"Sit down," he said, with affected calmness, for in reality he was bubbling over with passion at this defiance of his superb signoralty. "Sit down, my good soul. Now repeat what you have said. Repeat the whole story from the beginning. I do not wish, indeed for Planny's sake I can not afford, to be unreasonable, though at present I am far from convinced."

This was a very diplomatic move, for the fury of the veriest virago in creation will always evaporate to a certain extent in words. It was ten minutes' penance to hear Martha Hodge's story *de capo*, but Sir Robert resolved to bear it with every semblance of patient interest, too.

"Now," said he, in an altered tone, as though once more master in his own house, "I begin to grasp the full significance of your very painful revelation, Mrs. Hodge, and I have to thank you for the trouble you have taken to bring it home to my mind. I will, to a certain extent, avail myself of your advice, and endeavor to meet your wishes. I will telegraph for a London doctor. Our old friend of years gone by, Sir Marshall Midwinter, has retired long ago, but the best man in febrile cases I'm told is Dr. Shadfort. His fee is fifty guineas for a single visit, but I shall not grudge that, or ten times that, if necessary. Will that satisfy you?"

Martha pondered.

"'Twill be little good," she said, with quiet emphasis, "unless you dismiss Lembic; Lembic's the butcher."

An expression of cunning passed over the baronet's face as he rejoined, "Oh, as regards that, as soon as Dr. Shadfort is in attend-

ance Dr. Lembic will voluntarily retire from the case. That, I assure you, is a matter of strict professional etiquette."

"Oh!" ejaculated Martha, dubiously. "Then would you object to my nussing of the poor feller? I don't wish for no sellery."

"You must not ask that. Lady Marmyon is her son's proper and only nurse at this terrible crisis."

"Lady Marmyon didn't nuss him as a hinfant!" whimpered Martha.

"Now, now," cried Sir Robert, "do be a reasonable woman! I'm trying to meet your wishes to the utmost of my ability, and I'll do more, if you'll promise me to keep quiet, and, above all things, not divulge your secret to a soul. I'll do this, Mrs. Hodge. I'll institute privately such inquiries as shall test the accuracy of your son Robert's accusations against Errol and Dr. Lembic, and if I find out these true, it will be the worse for both. That I swear!"

This last word, having in it the sort of energy which appeals to a public-house intelligence, quite hoodwinked Mrs. Hodge. Her face beamed superbly as she grasped Sir Robert's hand with the assurance,

"I know'd you'd do right! I know'd you was a honorable gentleman. You're not the man, I feel sure, to leave your first-born to the mussy of mudderers. God bless 'ee, Sir Robert, and oh! if the poor dear bo-oy as was mine to love and cherish in his childhood be spared—there, I 'most thinks I could give up the public-'us and take to the teetotals for joy and gratertude."

And thus the interview ended, but its results were far-reaching. Sir Robert, with his high sense of honor, and his naturally unsuspicious nature, at the outset mentally rejected the bare notice of villainy on the part of either Errol or Dr. Lembic; but when Mrs. Hodge had waddled herself away to the Marmyon Arms, and he sat down to reflect coolly on her revelation, he could not conceal from himself that it was though improbable not impossible; also, that while it would be virtually unverifiable in either event, it might be absolute truth. Certainly Robert's manner, when before him as magistrate, gave a color to it, so did Mrs. Hodge's violence; and the only consideration on the other side was the advantage that Robert might have hoped to derive by trumping up this tale. This latter suspicion, however, was hardly on all-fours with Robert's conduct in seeking him out at a moment when he was quite in ignorance of the fact that he was wanted by the police. In short, Sir Robert was oppressed by a mental incubus. Feeling that he ought to act with vigor and promptitude, his mind, notwithstanding, was irresolute, and his judgment paralyzed.

He did, however, wire for Dr. Shadfort, who came down by the next train, examined the patient, prescribed for him, and complicated the situation not a little by congratulating Lady Marmyon on having on the spot so able and earnest a physician as Dr. Lembic.

Then he left, without expressing an opinion. He promised, however, in accordance with Sir Robert's reiterated request, to run down as early as possible the next morning.

After dinner the baronet summoned Errol into the library.

"Planny is dangerously ill," was his opening remark.

"Oh," replied the young man, jauntily, "no fear, he'll pull through. Confound him, he always had luck on his side."

"Indeed! I don't agree with you."

A pause—Errol waiting to ascertain his sire's pleasure.

"Errol," remarked Sir Robert, nervously, "if anything happened to Planny, you would be my heir. In that case it would be a crushing misfortune for you if any suspicious circumstances environed poor Planny's departure from this world."

And he fixed his eye full on the young man before him.

A thrill, like a spasm, shook Errol's frame, his mouth twitched, his lips blanched; but he replied, quite carelessly, "I don't quite comprehend your drift, father."

"I will be candid; but first I must have your solemn assurance that what passes within these four walls is not to be repeated under any pretext to a living soul."

Errol bowed his acquiescence, and Sir Robert proceeded:

"Up to the very hour of your friend Dr. Lembic's return from his sudden and inexplicable excursion to London, Planny was becoming rapidly and satisfactorily convalescent. True, his arm was only just set, and his face is very grievously disfigured; but he had no fever about him, still less typhoid."

"You don't mean to insinuate that Lembic's given him typhoid? because if that's what you're driving at, it's more than I can stand."

"Eh, what? Don't hector, don't menace me. Flatly, you have anticipated my meaning, and I speak, not on a presumption, but on evidence—yes, evidence, I am horrified to say, Errol."

If he wanted further evidence, he had only to look at the trembling, guilty countenance before him. Errol's braggadocio vanished, like a vapor in the sun, under the influence of plain words, and Sir Robert was certified of a truth he wished with all his heart to disbelieve.

"Have you nothing to say, Errol?"

"Nun—nothing," gasped his son, in a ghastly tone, adding, "except this—except this: if you have your suspicions, why don't you accuse Lembic?"

"Because, Errol, if I accuse Lembic, I accuse my own son."

Silence.

Errol's breath came short and sharp. He could not utter a word, though he tried to, and his eye quailed under that of his father.

At last Sir Robert spoke in a low, melancholy voice: "What has been the cause of this I can not divine. It may be covetousness, jealousy on account of Ida Frankalmoign, or simple hate—the hate of Cain for Abel. I have to deal with fact, and, alas! Errol, *known* fact—fact revealed to me by an influence remote from our circle! I gave that assertion of fact the lie direct. I acted as though it was necessarily false. But I can not go further to shield criminality, though, Heaven knows, I would perish rather than that my name, our ancient and glorious name, should suffer such disgrace. There may be yet time to avert consequences which, I warn you, would imperil your life, Errol. Go! Tell Dr. Lembic to leave this house at once. If he asks questions, refuse to answer. But go he shall and must, this very minute. Now, Errol, will you obey me?"

"I will obey you to the letter, father."

That was all. The library door opened, and they left the room together.

* * * * * * *

Mrs. Hodge, after her interview with Sir Robert, first sought the private chamber of Mrs. Hester Mazebrook, and over a glass of Marmyon port—vintage 1847, fruity and fortified, but to the female palate highly acceptable—had a little confidential chat. Mrs. Mazebrook must have been a little surprised at Martha Hodge's whispered confidences, for, truth to tell, her face wore the rather perturbed air afterward of one who had knowledge of something which somehow must be bottled up, yet ought by every moral right to be uncorked. Nevertheless, with the wisdom of a woman who has learned by experience the policy of reticence, she held her tongue. It was only the rather anxious look on her face that indicated her mental disquietude; in other respects she preserved her normal appearance.

The 1847 quaffed—and it did not take long, for Hester was by no means prodigal of a luxury reserved only for very old friends on very special occasions—Mrs. Hodge walked homeward with the heavy tread of obesity. But before seeking her own domicile she thought she would give Mrs. Gipps a call. They were friends, in the sense of being gossips, though Martha Hodge in the days of her greatest prosperity had never conferred any special favor on the good woman who had nursed by hand her Robert, possibly because in her secret soul she cherished a grudge about those twenty pounds, which John Hodge, in his petulant perversity—to her own intense horror, anger, and indignation—had paid over, according to previous promise, to the poor widow. They represented, in fact, twenty years of spite.

To-day, however, Martha Hodge was singularly affectionate to Widow Gipps, sympathized with her rheumatics, chatted affably about her difficulties, and then, as with Hester Mazebrook, commenced talking secrets, and secrets too, which appeared to excite a reciprocal interest in Widow Gipps. In fact, after an hour of this style of confidential conversation, a singular pact was struck—to this effect. Robert had been, as has been narrated, the old woman's mainstay; and now that he was gone she had come within a measurable distance of that bogey of pauper old age, the workhouse. When, therefore, Mrs. Hodge proposed that she should store her few sticks of furniture in the coach-house of the Marmyon Arms and take up her abode permanently under the roof of that hostelry as Mrs. Hodge's guest, the offer was one which gladdened an aged heart, and was accepted with effusive gratitude. It was not, however, subsequently quite so acceptable to another party concerned—Miss Belinda. "What could have induced you, mother, to bring that wretched, rheumatic, miserable hold thing Gipps into our 'ouse, to be a burding and a bawther?" Whereunto Mrs. Hodge made response, curtly, "I knows my business, I does, gal, and don't you go to meddle!"

CHAPTER IX.

A POCKET-BOOK'S EVIDENCE.

SIR ROBERT MARMYON'S candor proved to be little less than thaumaturgic. He was, as the reader may have remarked, anything but a bad man as men go. Gifted with a lofty sense of honor, invariably considerate to his equals, and chivalrous according to his notions of chivalry, the baronet was the very man to go straight after he saw his way clear. His faults were an ingrained selfishness, degenerating at times into meanness, and a perversity of intellect which led him to imagine that he fed the people, instead of, as was the plain patent fact, the people, as his cohort of servants and serfs, feeding him right royally. His errors, perhaps, were rather those of education and association than of ethics. Indeed, according to Aristotle's definition, he approached near enough to the magnanimous to be in the main worthy the respect of his fellows.

When, therefore, he was made cognizant of the cruel fact that his son and an unprincipled scientist—one of those hideous excrescences of philosophic Agnosticism that go to prove the truth of man without human sentiment being a monstrosity—had calmly joined hands to compass the death of one whom in his heart he did not like, but who was none the less heir to his title and estate, Sir Robert acted with all the resolute promptitude of one of his crusading ancestors. He not only cleared Dr. Lembic out of the house without the slightest pretense of courtesy, but he further dispatched Errol with the curt intimation that his presence would not be acceptable at Marmyon Court for some time to come. Then he sent a special messenger to London for Dr. Shadfort, and, to make assurance doubly sure, dismissed the nurse whom Dr. Lembic had imported, and telegraphed for the only nursing woman with whose name he was familiar, Nurse Pratling.

The conspirators left the Court together, taking the night train to London, and, as a matter of course, inasmuch as Sir Robert positively declined to meet Dr. Lembic or wish him farewell, on Errol devolved the unpleasant duty of informing that eminent physiologist that they were, if not absolutely discovered, at all events under grave suspicion. At this the experimental scientist laughed defiantly. Nevertheless, as soon as they were in the train and actually beyond the dire wrath of Sir Robert, he remarked, with quiet satisfaction,

"All's well that ends well, friend Errol Marmyon."

"I don't understand you," replied the other, whose reflections were much the reverse of agreeable. "All I know is that if Planny does go, I should not like to be answerable for what course my father will adopt. He has certain quixotic notions of his own concerning right and wrong."

"Pooh!" retorted Dr. Lembic. "Your nerve is simply gone, or you would not utter such childish balderdash. Do? Why, what could Sir Robert do? Did you ever read Pickwick? Don't you remember when old Wardle asks Alfred Jingle, 'What prevented him

from denouncing him as an impostor,' how Jingle gave the old humbug a direct answer with 'Pride, sir, pride!' Pride, my boy, would tie the hands of Sir Robert. Do you imagine for an instant that for the sake of abstract justice or revenge he would gibbet his sole remaining son, and that one heir of his ancient name? Bosh, Errol!"

"I don't know."

"Of course you don't, in your present state of scare. However, there's no need to discuss a contingency which is not going to arise. If I feared it I should not say, as I do now, 'All's well that ends well.' But it was, in plain English, touch-and go. At the very instant when you hurried upstairs from the library with that ridiculously guilty tell-tale expression on your face, I was about to administer something—better, perhaps, not be specific as to what that was—which would have finished Master Plantagenet. Under the circumstances, I thought it better policy to vary the treatment. Ha! ha!"

"And with what apparent result?"

"Well, candidly, it was not a virulent case of typhoid, and that behemoth of a brother of yours has a constitution of cast-iron. I saw from the first that, without artificial stimulus, he must inevitably pull through. He is now passing through the crisis. It will seem so to by-standers, though not, I fancy, to Shadfort, who has a splendid diagnosis of his own, and will, fortunately, credit me—as is the case indisputably—with saving the patient's life. Unless, therefore, your father is lunatic enough to chatter in sheer despair of the fellow's recovery, you and I have no cause for nervousness; and that, I will swear, Sir Robert will not do."

"Planny will live, then," whispered Errol, with a gasp of relief.

"Bar accidents—that is, bar Shadfort's blundering, which is a mathematical impossibility, or some amazing error in nursing, or, of course, the unforeseen. Yes, he would live were I in attendance on him."

Another sigh of intense satisfaction. Conscience makes even rogues cowards.

"I'm glad of it. A dozen Marmyons, and all the titles in the peerage, are not worth the hours of agony I've gone through."

"Hum! Folly, weakness, sentiment! And you, Errol, a vivisector! You, who will take a dog in the full enjoyment of a happy, wholesome young life, strap it down to a board, put a gag into it, mouth, and carve every fraction of it that is not vital, bit by bits limb by limb, reserving the vitals as a *bonne bouche*. What hypocrisy! what sickening irrationality! Pray, what is the difference between a dog and a man? Answer me that."

"Well," stammered Errol, "I suppose a man has what you call a soul, or, at all events, a greater facility for enjoyment than a dog."

"Soul!" snorted Dr. Lembic. "What's a soul? Who's ever seen a soul? What, if you please, is the specific gravity of a soul? If you assert that the brain of Planny, for example, is bigger than that of your dog Flo, then I understand what you mean. But, even on that hypothesis, I really fail to perceive why there is any greater objection to killing, or, if you please, vivisecting a man than a dog. In fact, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, if you talk about moral sentiment, the dog deserves a more merciful fate than the

man. Depend upon it, my dear young friend, this kind of morbid scrupulosity, which after all is but the outcome of superstition, never exists in really great minds. Look at the two Napoleons. The first was educated in the grand school of Robespierre, and he displayed a splendid indifference to every species of sentimentality, including marriage. Talk about vivisection! Surely he made all Europe one vast torture-trough, and his successor in the dynasty, Napoleon III., was equally thorough. The *coup d'état* I consider a sublime stroke of genius."

Errol tried to smile, but the effort was feeble. He could not as yet boast the corticated conscience of Dr. Lembic. Perhaps his fault was that he was too young. The mental tissues seldom indurate in callow youth.

"Then you don't think such characters as Macbeth or Judas are drawn on the lines of nature? Eh, doctor?"

"Oh, yes, I do. Imagination is a powerful factor in the composition of the brain. I can quite understand a man of little backbone working himself up into a belief that he had committed a sin, but the effort would only be an excess of egotism."

"Do you mean to say you can't sin?"

"You may sin against our social code, and involve yourself in disagreeable consequences. Otherwise, no."

"There I differ. If Planny had died, if Planny were to die, I should roam the world like Lamech, a horror to myself."

"That, my young friend, is your egotism. You've too much self-esteem about you. You exaggerate your own importance."

Errol pondered for a moment. Then he replied,

"*Amour propre*, surely, would hardly account for a state of feeling that would cause one to hate and loathe one's self."

"Oh, yes, it would. Pardon me, Errol Marmyon is a Unitarian. He worships one god, and that god is Errol Marmyon. Your deity would—for some reason best known to itself—be implacable, and so you would, as you imagine, exist in a kind of Inferno. But you are wrong. The first bottle of champagne, a glance at the big balance at your banker's, and a kiss from Miss Ida's sweet lips—faugh! such delights would cure the megrims in a trice. Do you imagine that Napoleon III. could not enjoy life because the gutters of Paris were impurpled with the blood of his friends as well as his foes, with a holocaust of innocent victims slain by his mandate? My dear Errol, your sentiments are simply pappy—infantile."

"Perhaps," faltered Errol, apologetically, after a pause, "I'm rather inclined to imbecility just now, because I've had the bad luck to everlastingly offend my father."

"Ah, that's practical. There is some sense in regretting a mistake. But, in the name of wonder, however did Sir Robert guess our little game?"

"I cannot imagine. Can the nurse have suspected?"

"No; of that I am positive. I brought her down as being one who regards me reverentially. Besides, she knows nothing."

"Then I am posed."

"And I too, not being an ardent believer in special revelations. But what matter? You did not confess, or talk in your sleep?"

"Not I."

"Enough: we hold a hostage in the fact of your name being Errol Marmyon. There is no stronger motive power in this wide world than family pride. It is *selon moi* a vulgar, irrational, inaccurate, and ridiculous anachronism, but its potentiality survives, and can throw a veil over what people are pleased to term murder itself."

"Change for Victoria," interposed the voice of the guard, whose ear caught the last word, uttered as it was with meaningful emphasis."

While the pretty pair were thus discussing the philosophy of sin, their victim lay between life and death, for the nonce without a doctor and without a nurse. Actuated by a strong sense of duty, and where right appeared right to him he scorned consequences with the chivalry of one of Arthur's knights, Sir Robert took his station by Plantagenet's bedside, and remained there with all the zeal of a Sister of St. Vincent of Paul, until the special train he had chartered brought down Dr. Shadfort and Nurse Pratling.

The former, to his intense relief, took a hopeful view of the case, and to Sir Robert's hint that it had been mismanaged by Dr. Lembic, gave an emphatic, nay, more, a stern denial. Indeed, he avowed that the crisis was over, and that the very circumstances of the patient's having surmounted it must be attributed to Dr. Lembic's skill and accurate diagnosis.

Sir Robert felt the awkwardness of the situation, but he did not care to contend with medical authority, still less to show his hand. All he urged was that Dr. Shadfort would be so good as to see the patient through.

"But he is through," was Dr. Shadfort's reply. "All you have to guard against is a relapse, and that is a contingency I do not anticipate;" at which utterance the baronet's face displayed an almost ridiculous expression of puzzlement. Clearly, he was skeptical to Dr. Shadfort's verdict being verified by the result.

Twenty-two odd years had metamorphosed Mrs. Pratling from a nipping, middle-aged into a frosty old woman. White hair, however, and a slight loss of adipose tissue had not changed her mental faculties. She was the same shrewd, managing, self-conscious body that we remember of old, with a keen eye to business, and, under her benevolence for others, a wholesome regard for the interests of Number One.

"Which, Sir Robert," she remarked, "fever nursing's not much in my line. In general, I prefer the monthly business, when it's a lady. But I wouldn't go to refuse you, Sir Robert. Not me, arter the kindness you showed me in days gone by."

And so Nurse Pratling assumed the function of ministering angel to the big man, whom she remembered well as a mite of a baby, and she did her duty like an intelligent woman to whom long experience had rendered every obstacle easy to surmount.

The following morning, as Sir Robert was writing his usual budget in the library—one of the uglier accidents of exalted social position is a mass of superfluous correspondence—a knock at the door announced Mrs. Hester Mazebrook.

"Er—ah, Mazebrook; I'm er—ah, very busy! What is it?"

"It's only this yere, Sir Robert—a pocketbook as Dr. Lembic left in his bedroom afore he went away last night. I thought it betterer,

Sir Robert, to put it in your 'and direct. 'Tain't my business, Sir Robert."

"Why this behawder, my good Mazebrook? I—I don't understand! Oh, I see, Dr. Lembic's pocketbook. Er—ah, quite right. That will do, I will forward it in due course to Dr. Lembic. Much obliged to you."

Mrs. Mazebrook, however, instead of going as her superior had more than once hinted, stood there reddening and awkward, as though she had something on the tip of her tongue, which, come what may, must be uttered. Seldom had the quiet, retiring specimen of femininity presented so abnormal an appearance to her master's eye.

Sir Robert walked to the window agitated.

"Er—ah, Mazebrook, I really am very busy. I've a lot of most important letters to write. Er—ah, what do you want, my good woman? Can't you speak?"

"Well, Sir Robert, I own I done wrong, Sir Robert. That I does, and perhaps if I'd got to do it again, Sir Robert, I shouldn't do what I have done. And yet I don't quite know—"

There was a terrible mixture about this utterance which angered the impatient baronet and caused him to fire off the monosyllable "Well!" as though it had been a percussion-cap.

"It were only cur'osity," whimpered Hester, in a miserable tone.

Sir Robert glanced at the fat, leathern pocketbook on the table before him, then at his faithful housekeeper. That was enough. His quick perception revealed the rest without another word being uttered, and his look in consequence altered from impatience to pain, not unmingled with horror and dismay.

"I done wrong," reiterated Hester, "I knows I have; but havin' so done it I feels it's a dooty I owes to you, Sir Robert, as has been my kind friend and benefactor, to ast you to open that there pocketbook and judge of its contents for yourself."

Sir Robert walked to the window, agitated—perhaps terrified.

"That will do, Mazebrook. You may leave the room."

"Yes, Sir Robert."

"Or stop. Does anybody know anything about the contents of this except yourself? Tell me the truth, I beg you, Mazebrook."

"Only Nurse Pratling, Sir Robert."

"Ha! How did she come to know anything about it?"

"Well, Sir Robert, if you'd oblige me by opening that there pocketbook and lookin' at what's inside of it, you would not go to blame me for asking nurse what I oughter do. It's a part of my dooty, as my lady told me, whenever anybody as is a visitor leaves, to go round arterwards and see whether there's anything belongin' to 'um lying about, and I makes it a rule, Sir Robert, so to do. Consequently, when Dr. Lembic went away to London with Master Errol that sudden and unexpected last night, I locked the door of his bedroom, and after breakfast this morning I had a hunt round. That's how I found this yere gentleman's pocket-book, Sir Robert; and when I commenced to hopen it I were that astonished I didn't know what was my dooty—I didn't. It's all the cur'osity, Sir Robert, as gets us women into mischief. Look at Eve with that there happle. Couldn't bring 'erself to leave it alone, must take a bite.

Just the same along of I. If you believe me, I held that there pocket-book in my 'and for the matter of a minit. Then I says to myself, 'Shall I?' I says. And do it I did; but perhaps it may be as well, for it's but right, Sir Robert, as you should be informed in regard of the character of them as you harbors in your house, and toward whom you extends your lib'ral hospitality."

If Sir Robert had not been nonplussed as to what course to pursue, he would have cut short the prolix utterance of a woman who, "in virtue of her high office in the Court," considered it proper to be ponderous. As it was, she ran down, like a clock, slowly, and even then her master seemed irresolute; at last he said, with an air of forced indifference, "I don't feel quite certain as to whether I ought to touch Dr. Lembic's pocket-book, or whether, indeed, it would be honorable on my part to ascertain its contents. I can, from my own personal knowledge, form a guess as regards the nature of the documents to which you refer; they certainly possess an interest for me. But, Mazebrook, I don't see my way clear. Leave the pocket-book for the present with me. It may be wanted sooner or later. You have done your duty, though in future you must avoid prying into the secrets of other people. That will do."

Mrs. Mazebrook was about to retire, when Sir Robert bade her tell one of the grooms that he would be wanted to go to Maidstone. With that message she left her master's presence.

As soon as she was gone, Sir Robert seized the pocket-book and locked it up in his secret drawer. Then he sat down and wrote as follows:

"*To Mr. Inspector Granden, Maidstone.*

"Marmyon Court, December, 18—.

"DEAR SIR,—We do not, on reconsideration, desire to press the charge against Robert Hodge; in fact he has been sufficiently punished by the amount of incarceration he has already endured. Under the circumstances you will please obtain his release, and, if necessary, I will be bail for his appearance if called for by the Bench. Be good enough to give him the sovereign (£1) which I herewith send by bearer, and request him to call on me without delay. Faithfully yours,

"ROBERT MARMYON."

"There," soliloquized Sir Robert, "I have exhibited the leniency which I am certain Planny would wish me to display were he, poor fellow, in a condition to give an opinion. And now for just one word with Nurse Pratling."

Accordingly, having rung for the groom and despatched him with the letter and the sovereign to Inspector Granden, he summoned nurse to a private confab.

That conscientious woman could not leave her patient for long, nevertheless she was not sorry for a talk with Sir Robert. Talks of that kind with people of Sir Robert's sort commonly germinate into tips, and this good soul, like most people when they arrive at the sere and yellow epoch of existence, was dearly fond of lucre.

"How do, nurse? Sit down a minute, will you? Odd this about these promissory notes in Dr. Lembic's note-book?"

"Wery," responded nurse, dryly.

"You will please say nothing about it! You understand me?"

"Mummerer nor a church mouse, Sir Robert."

"That's right. And about Planny. Going on well?"

"Couldn't be better, so the doctor say."

"Big man he's grown, hasn't he?"

"That he have. He weren't such a monstrous baby! When I went to compare him with Missus Hodge's little un, though they was alike in the eyes and ears he were the littler of the two, partickler in the matter of bones; and he had a sort of a thickening of the throat, he had, which old Sir Marshall Midwinter spoke to me about, but that he've outgrown altogether. Likewise, he had the prettiest little foot as ever I seed in a baby, and I recollects Hester, the maid, as is now promoted to be 'ousekeeper, she told me that Lady Marmyon's foot is as beautiful as her hands is, and fit for a sculptor. But that, too, I sees he's out-growed, for his feet has twisted toes, and is strong and hugly. Couldn't have believed it."

"Age makes a difference," responded Sir Robert, dryly. "We all change, Mrs. Pratling," with a histrionic sigh.

"'Taint often a child as is born with small bones develops big uns, and with little feet huge uns, and with a sort of goiterish throat a ordinary un. That's what I calls a freak of nature, Sir Robert. Now your bones is small, and I'll warrant you was a small-boned baby; and you've got, too, a little foot and hand, and a thickish throat—not goiterish, Sir Robert, but what they calls in the theayters 'colossal.'"

"Well," remarked the baronet, "Planny is what he is, and if we can nurse him to convalescence that will be all I shall ask. You may rely upon me also, Mrs. Pratling, to be exceptionally liberal. You are indeed engaged on a duty of prime importance in every way. Remember that!"

"I was about to ask a favor, Sir Robert. There's a widder 'oman from the village of the name of Gipps, as have come and offered to help nurse. Now I bain't so young as I used to was, and I wants a little sleep at times, so, if you've no objections, Mrs. Gipps might watch while I gets forty winks. I'd rather trust to an experienced woman, though she be oldish, than to the chits of girls you've got here for housemaids. Ten to one they'd doze off as soon as you would be asleep, and then I would not be answerable for what might happen. He must be watched—carefully."

Sir Robert had no objection, so nurse returned to the sick-room, and then he opened his secret drawer, and examined Dr. Lembic's pocket-book inquisitively. It contained not only ten promissory notes of the value of £5,000 apiece, drawn in his favor by Errol, but also a number of medical receipts. The significance of these was lost upon him, for they were scribbled in the abbreviated Latin, which doctors affect, but he judged that they might have some bearing on typhoid, and resolved to treasure them. He had, in fact, after a vain attempt to decipher medical romany, just replaced the pocket-book in his drawer when Lady Marmyon entered with a perturbed face.

"What has Errol done?" she asked, peremptorily. "The second

post is just in, and I have a letter from the poor boy imploring me to intercede for him with you."

"Don't ask me," was her husband's reply.

"Robert!"

"I repeat—don't ask. Errol needs no intercession. The time may come when I may be able to forget. But not yet."

"You surprise, you pain me, Robert."

"I wished to save you pain, so I kept silence. Suffer me not to break that seal—just yet. I will reply to Errol."

CHAPTER X.

ENTREATY.

THE groom drove a fast dog-cart to Maidstone, a good fifteen miles, delivered a letter to the inspector, and in a trice Robert Hodge was liberated from durance vile. When, however, the man offered him the sovereign and gave him Sir Robert's mandate to come to the Court forthwith, the eye of the young laborer flashed fire, and he responded, quietly, "You may tell your master that I won't touch his gold, and that I don't obey his orders. Lucky for him if I don't bring an action for false imprisonment, or malicious prosecution, or something."

"If I was you," answered the groom, "I would not be a ass. A quid's a quid, whoseever money it is. Take it and ride back in my trap. Sir Robert don't mean bad by you."

"No. I shall walk."

And so with but a few shillings in his pocket this proud-spirited young fellow started to trudge afoot.

He arrived at the Marmyon Arms after dark, tired and sulky. From Belinda he learned that Plantagenet Marmyon remained in a critical state, and that Mrs. Gipps had volunteered—at Mrs. Hodge's earnest request—to help to nurse him. He further was acquainted with a fact which the groom did not impart, viz., the sudden disappearance of Errol Marmyon and Dr. Lembic. Having duly digested these data and a rough supper provided by Belinda in the absence of her mother, who had gone up to the Court to pay Mrs. Mazebrook an evening call and learn the latest bulletin, he went to bed and to sleep. Maidstone jail does not provide its occupants with superfluous luxuries, and Robert Hodge had girded against the confinement and regulations like a caged eagle, to such an extent that he had not been able while behind the bars either to sleep or to eat. A little more of it and he would have been in hospital.

On the morrow he rose considerably later than the lark, being abnormally weary, owing to the discipline of a prison, and a long walk on the top of it. Love bore him on her wings swiftly to Polly Williams. Having resolved seriously to try his fortune in the United States, he wished to extract an assurance from her that she would follow when he had made for her a home across the Atlantic, a result obtainable, according to his calculations, in a few months at the outside.

While he was thus agreeably engaged with his sweetheart, there

was being enacted rather a scene at the Marmyon Arms. Widow Gipps toddled down the first thing in the capacity which, to some natures, is almost pleasurable on account of the factitious importance it gives, viz., as the bearer of bad news.

Plantagenet had a relapse.

That was indeed a sensation sufficiently thrilling. It sent Mrs. Hodge at nine o'clock in the morning straight to the gin bottle. It evidently upset Mrs. Gipps, who required a similar and sympathetic gratification. It set the wires flying, and caused Sir Robert to pace the library like a leopard in a cage. Lady Marmyon tried to hatch up a tear, but hardly succeeded; indeed, she wrote by stealth to her favorite Errol to assure him that nothing he could ever do would change her maternal heart, and that in all likelihood he would become within a very few hours the heir. And when at last Dr. Shadfort arrived from town and delivered himself enigmatically and oracularly, but by no means in the same terms as before, the general feeling became intense.

Dr. Shadfort could not remain all day with the patient. A duke was lying quite as ill in Grosvenor Square, and he could not afford to offend strawberry leaves, even though Plantagenet were to lose his life in consequence. He remained, however, until after luncheon, and then Sir Robert drove with him in the brougham to the station in order to hear the last word. Up to yesterday Sir Robert had not been devotedly attached to Plantagenet, and indeed had preferred Errol, as being in all respects—as he put it—more of a Marmyon. Nevertheless, there had been some unity of sentiment between the father and his elder son—Plantagenet's manliness had throughout commanded his respect. Now, however, that he was horror-stricken at Errol's villainy, his feelings had become intensified. He earnestly hoped and prayed that Plantagenet might be spared, for in him, at all events, the name of Marmyon would suffer no dishonor, whereas, if Errol became the representative of the family, he knew not what to expect. Pride, in short, rendered Sir Robert solicitous in the extreme, and he trembled to think that another turn of this typhoid tide might not only rob him of Plantagenet, but further make Errol his heir.

At the station he extracted a pledge from Dr. Shadfort to return in the next twelve hours, chartering a special train, if necessary, and then he bade that eminent physician a sad farewell, in his heart believing that when he arrived after midnight it would be too late.

As the brougham passed through the village he espied the familiar figure of Robert Hodge in close converse with Polly Williams. At once an impulse caused him to stop, alight, and walk toward the young man, who, in lieu of touching his hat, in accordance with the rigid etiquette of Marmyon village, stared his feudal lord straight in the face; not insolently—far from it—but with an air of dislike, injury, and pain.

"Robert," said the baronet, with strong emotion, "I have unwittingly done you wrong. Forgive me. I am indeed sorry."

And he held out his hand.

Robert Hodge possessed a vein of eccentricity, and he was just then smarting under the indignity of an imprisonment which he regarded as a wanton return of evil for his good; but this greeting

was so unlike the ordinary superbity of Sir Robert that it simply staggered him.

He took the baronet's hand limply, and replied jocularly,

"Right or wrong, Sir Robert, it makes no difference. I've had enough of this country, and as soon as may be shall be across the Atlantic. This is no place for a poor man—leastways for one of my sort."

Sir Robert looked him in the face, started, flushed, looked again, and responded,

"No, don't go. You have already, though you know it not, earned a position here in your native country—a position, Robert, which will not be that of a poor man, that I promise you."

Robert Hodge lifted his large, poetic, hazel eyes, and returned the strange inquiring gaze of the baronet, whose manner struck him as being unaccountable.

"I don't want to be a publican," he observed, assuming that Sir Robert had in contemplation some such immoral reward for a service he was quite able to appreciate.

"Of course you don't. No man worth his salt ever did. No, I've better things in store for you than that; in fact you shall make your own bargain, and the chances are, whatever that bargain may be—for you are far too proud to be covetous—I shall treble it. You know why I am bound to you, Robert, but you do not know, you can not realize how deep is my sentiment of gratitude toward you, and intensely I regret the error into which I was inadvertently betrayed."

There stood Sir Robert Marmyon almost a suppliant, and opposite him, with a strangely diffident expression, Robert Hodge, while in the immediate background was the lovely face and fairy figure of Polly Williams, posed in a listening attitude, indicative of the strongest interest.

"You need not demean yourself to me, Sir Robert," responded the young man. "We are different, you and I. You are of the upper crust, I of the lower. Between us there is and can be no tie. We are as opposite as night and day or as summer and winter. All I can answer you is, that I would rather go to a land where all are equal. I'm sick of inferiority. Here a man of my sort, with some ideas and aspirations, is repressed, detested, sent to Maidstone jail. No; let me go to America; and if you feel yourself under an obligation to me—as, indeed, perhaps you are—pay my passage and that of my sweetheart here. We would rather go together than one after the other."

Sir Robert glanced round at the modest, blushing face of Polly, and smiled. This little ray of sunlight gave the girl heart, and she joined in, as one who had a right to speak, in tremulous silvery accents.

"Do 'ee, Sir Robert, overpersuade him not to go to Ameriky. I don't want to go all that way, and never see father and mother again. I be content, I be, with Kent."

"You hear, Robert," urged the baronet; "this good girl agrees with me that you would be better off here. Besides which, Robert, you and I belong to this old shire. We are the same breed. Look at us. We are pretty much a match—the same height, the same

build, the same color, and countenance. Why, I might be your elder brother. Come, your back's up, and perhaps you've reason for that on your side. But don't be irreconcilable. That's not the true Kentish temper. I am anxious not only to atone for the wrong done, but to earn your friendship, Robert."

Strong words for a proud man, and all the stronger for being so manifestly sincere.

"Robert!" whispered Polly, coaxingly catching his hand and enforcing her plea by a gentle pressure.

But Robert's face hardened. He held his tongue for a brief minute, then he responded rather gawkily, "I don't think with you, Sir Robert. I'm a Republican. I regard your class as usurpers of what belongs to us. You may tempt my girl, and she may get round me, but all your favors will never alter my mind. You, Sir Robert, are a man of the aristocracy, I am a man of the people."

Sir Robert flushed—in vexation, perhaps, rather than anger. He knew, however, that he was answered, so he simply said, "Well, think it over. You are not off to America by the next mail, I hope. Come to the Court whenever you will, and bring your sweetheart too. You will find a warmer welcome than you expect, and though I am a Royalist and you are a Republican, we need not quarrel. Good-day to you both!" And with dignity Sir Robert re-entered his brougham and drove to the Court.

"Well," protested Polly to her lover, "you be a awkward-tempered chap. What made 'ee meet the squire so criss-crossedly? Oh, you silly you."

"I don't know," smiled Robert, proudly. "'Tis, I suppose, because I resent his patronage worse than his persecution."

"If you loved me true," she muttered, "you'd think of me and my wishes, Robert." And she looked her words.

"I do love you," he answered, "and I expect you for that very reason to trust me implicitly. 'Twould be better far for us two to be poor in the land of the free than rich and under the thumb of that despot. Can't you see this?"

"Not me. If the land of the free is the t'other side of the world, and I'm to be poor there, away from every one, I certainly should prefer remaining where I am, Robert."

"You can do so." This with a sort of sneer rather hard to bear.

"Robert, what do you mean?"

"Why, that I can go alone if you won't go with me."

"You intend to go, then—to reject Sir Robert's offer?"

"Yes."

"Then Robert you are hard, cruel, obstinate. Surely you ought to wish to make your sweetheart happy."

"My mind's made up," he said, doggedly.

"Suppose I were to make up mine?"

"If you mean, Polly, to throw me over, I'll give you as good as you give me. You must do as you will."

"Well, Robert, let us stop here."

"Not we. One goes; the other can go or stay." That is my final decision. Sir Robert could not bribe me to alter it, neither shall you tempt me. I've been degraded by that jail, and I hate a land which has treated me, though for a few hours only, as a felon. Now

you know why I won't stop, why I must go to America. I want to wash my hands of England, and become a citizen of some country where I shall not be at the mercy of a Sir Robert Marmyon."

"There, there," cried Polly, "you go and think it over. Your temper drives you to-day, perhaps your heart may lead you to-morrow. Good-by. Mother wants me.

And the pretty girl tripped away in haste, avoiding thereby an issue which was evidently fraught with peril to her peace of mind.

* * * * * * *

Dr. Shadfort came down, in accordance with his promise, by special train, arriving at Marmyon a little after one o'clock in the morning. Sir Robert was in the dining-room to receive him and offer refreshments, and after a hurried glass of wine the doctor went up to the sick-room. A brief examination, coupled with the statement of Nurse Pratling, convinced him that there was no improvement, and in typhoid not to go forward is to go backward. In fact he saw a slight change for the worse, and said as much, with the strict candor which Sir Robert had implored him to use in speaking of the case—a candor almost unprofessional.

"It is," he remarked, "quite the most peculiar development of typhoid fever that I ever remember to have witnessed. Your son, Sir Robert, is a young man of gigantic muscular power, and clearly possesses an equine constitution; yet he has passed through the crisis only to experience a damaging relapse. There is hope, yet abundant cause for the gravest anxiety. There is only one case in my recollection that I could call parallel to this, and that was the case of a navvy, and he pulled through eventually; but then your son, though an athlete and all that kind of thing, is not a navvy. It is a battle between nature and poison."

And so the long hours of the night wore away, Dr. Shadfort getting a wink of sleep on the sofa, and the morning dawned upon the sick man and the watchers. Still there was no improvement, and consequent upon no advance a perceptible increment of weakness. The doctor evidently was anxious, yet he wished to get back to his duke, and fidgeted about the hours of the trains till Sir Robert felt almost angry. Surely his son and heir was of as much importance as any individual in the kingdom—at all events, outside the ranks of royalty.

It was at breakfast-time that a telegram arrived for Dr. Shadfort. He was sipping meditatively a cup of coffee, and read the missive almost indifferently. Then he threw it across to Sir Robert. It ran thus:

"*From Lembic, Oxford, to Shadfort, Marmyon.*

"See in to-day's papers relapse of patient. If Sir Robert will give you prescription marked B in pocket-book, will save him."

"What does that mean?" inquired the doctor, carelessly.

"I can guess," replied the baronet; "but, my dear doctor, promise me this, that you will not use Lembic's prescription unless it commends itself to you as an impartial man. I have no faith in Dr. Lembic."

"And I have," responded Dr. Shadfort, dryly.

Sir Robert left the room, and after five minutes absence returned with a prescription marked B, which he handed, with an inquiring air in his face, for the inspection of the doctor.

"Why," exclaimed Dr. Shadfort, "this is an antidote. Some mistake, I expect. However, it can do no harm. You may try it or not, as you will. Any local chemist can make it up. Perhaps Lembic had a reason for it; perhaps he may have hazarded an experiment. He is fond of treating patients as subjects—all physiologists are so."

"Yes," replied Sir Robert. "Then it can do no harm, and it is an antidote; so that if he has been wrongly treated before you arrived, it may correct the wrong? Is that it?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall, on my own authority, make the experiment."

"Do so, and on my return from town I shall be able to apprise you of the result. Expect me by eight at the latest."

And so Dr. Shadfort once more slipped away to kill or cure his moribund strawberry-leaves, and Mrs. Gipps, who had been up all night, and was inwardly convinced that the patient was doomed, slipped on her bonnet and shawl, and toddled feebly as far as the Marmyon Arms to tell his foster-mother the evil tidings.

Mrs. Martha Hodge was sober, quiet, and, so far as her brain could be, collected. She said, in response to Mrs. Gipps, "Yes, I've been expectin' of it, and I've made up my mind now what to do. I shall walk up to the Court, and before the poor boy's breath is out of his blessed body I shall say that which will surprise Sir Robert Marmyon, and my lady, and Master Errol, and a few others. My motto is, 'While there is hope there is life, and when hope is over, life's a question of hours.' There ain't no time to lose, Mrs. Gipps. I must speak now or be forever silent, and speak I will. My conscience drives me to do it, and if it didn't I've a big score to settle with that there murdering demon, Master Errol, and that accomplice of his, Doctor What's-his-name."

CHAPTER XI.

THE SPORT OF TORTURE.

ERROL returned with Dr. Lembic to Oxford. He had, so far as residence goes, already kept his terms, though he had not taken his degree, and indeed expected to obtain the highest honors in natural science, in consequence of his studies in that department of knowledge and the smattering of physiology he had picked up by association with Dr. Lembic. At the present moment, being ostracized from his home, he knew of no more pleasant place of residence than the University City, and no more harmonious spirit wherewith to chum than the cold-blooded scientist, who would have removed for him the one obstacle that lay across his path had it been feasible. But though miles away from Marmyon Court, the guilty conscience or nervous apprehension of Errol caused him to watch every post and every paragraph in the society papers. He had arranged hurriedly with the groom to wire him the condition of Plantagenet when any

change occurred, and it was a wire announcing the relapse that caused him to seek the laboratory of Dr. Lembic late at night, and in a miserable frame of mind.

He found that worthy disciple of Schiff and Paul Bert with a big spaniel-dog before him. The animal was of the female variety, having lately had a litter of pups, and he was engaged leisurely in dissecting its *mammæ*, in callous indifference to the animal's hideous moans. By his side the blind puppies were croaking for their mother's milk, to the professor's intense amusement, while the tortured parent's agony was intensified by her appreciation of the hunger of her little ones.

"Bother you, Marmyon!" observed the doctor. "You just interrupted a most delicate experiment. I shall have to use another bitch for the purpose, and this one happens to be abnormally well-developed. Really, my dear fellow, you should be more considerate, and not startle an operator by bursting into his sanctum in that sudden way!"

Whatever interfered between this inquisitor and his victim was a crime.

"I'm very, very sorry," replied Errol, who combined the soul of a blackguard with the manner of a courtier. "But you must not blame me in this instance. My business would not keep, in spite of the best subjects that ever were created to amuse or instruct physiologists. Fact is, Plantagenet's had a relapse."

"Well, my dear sir, what of that? You've no cause to grumble, surely? If Plantagenet Marmyon goes the way of all flesh, then Errol will become monarch, sooner or later, of that family principality of yours down in Kent. Upon my honor, my very dear friend, I congratulate you."

But this species of *mauvaise plaisanterie* did not quite assimilate with Errol's mood at the moment. Dr. Lembic might be cool and confident, prepared to brazen out words and actions which, in the young man's opinion, carried on their face condemnation. But he, knowing as he did his father's temper, alive also to the alarming truth that somebody, he knew not who, was in the secret, and might accuse him should the tragedy they had plotted end fatally, could not regard the subject thus jauntily. Moreover, though he hated his brother, and coveted his inheritance intensely, his internal sense of right, which, though enfeebled, was not quite obliterated, caused him to crave earnestly that the plot might not succeed. Indeed, coward as he was, his mouth twitched, his cheek was hectic, his eye restless, and his hand tremulous.

"Wait a minute," pursued Dr. Lembic, in a tone of entreaty, "until I've removed this *mamma*. I can't do two things at once—dissect this beautiful subject and chatter about your brother. So."

Errol stamped his foot in impatience on the floor, and then perceiving the litter of six pups, stooped and picked up one of them, holding it to the light, while the mother for the nonce must almost have forgotten the torture she was suffering; for the poor creature strained her head to watch what this demon would do with her baby.

Miserable victim! Poor loving creature of a good God, she had indeed fallen into the nethermost hell when she was exchanged by the daughter of a starving blind beggar for a few shillings, being

no longer of any use for the purposes of mendicancy on account of her small family.

Errol felt the pup all over. Then, remarking casually, "It's mere gristle, after all," he snatched up a lancet and a pair of pincers, laid the pup on the edge of the torture trough, and made what is technically termed a "window" in its side—that is to say, he flayed away a square of skin, broke two of the ribs and thus obtained a view of the young thing's internal mechanism.

The puppy's shrill shriek evidently caused intense suffering to the mother; and when Errol, in derision, held its bleeding body close to that mother's face, a tear—yes, a tear—bedewed the poor dog's face, a circumstance that did not fail to attract the attention of Dr. Lembic.

"Upon my honor," exclaimed he, enthusiastically, "this is affecting. Our poor old lady here reminds me of the women at the Lyceum when Irving is playing Charles the First. Really, really, Mrs. Spaniel, you are quite too emotional. When I've done with your *mammæ*, my dear, I will investigate the quality of your lachrymatory glands."

"I wish to goodness," grumbled Errol, "you'd listen to me for five consecutive minutes. I did not come here to play with dogs," throwing the mangled pup into a corner to die of slow agony, as best it might. "I've come on serious business; so do attend, doctor, and oblige me."

"Ugh!" sighed the physiologist; "it's just like my luck. Whenever I get a really superlative subject, I am certain to be interrupted. Well, go on; you've spoiled my fun."

"This is what I have to say," observed Errol; for the doctor, leaving his subject to drip blood into the trough, had washed his hands and lit a cigar with the view of giving his attention to the matter in hand. "Planny is going, that's clear. I've a wire that puts beyond doubt that his relapse is serious and has quite checkmated Dr. Shadfort, who was at first cock-sure about the case. Now if, as appears all but certain, Planny goes, what is our position?"

"Mine," answered the doctor, fixing his eye on the mutilated and living spaniel over the torture-trough with intense and gloating satisfaction—"mine, I take it, is unaltered. So far as you are concerned, I shall expect you to keep to your bargain."

"Tut, tut! I don't mean that. I mean, what is our position legally—in the eye of the law of England?"

"I don't understand. Who is going to accuse me of causing Plantagenet to contract typhoid? You can't, for you don't know whether I was the cause, however much you may suspect me. Shadfort can't, for he did not enter upon the case till the crisis. Pray, who is my accuser? Answer me that, my friend?"

"I wish I knew. If I did know, if I could form a surmise, I might easily square him or her, for money will do anything and everything. But I don't. That's the curse of it."

"And, therefore, don't worry!"

"And therefore, so you would argue, play the part of the ostrich. No, Dr. Lembic, not for you or all the world. My father is just the man, from a mistaken sense of honor, to denounce us as the

slayers of his first-born; but even if pride, as you imagine, should put a seal on his lips, there remains the unknown and unsuspected witness, the witness who revealed to my father all about the promissory notes, all—"

"By the bye," interposed Dr. Lembic, "I did an amazingly stupid thing: I left behind at Marmyon my pocket-book containing those very promissory notes—at least, such is my impression. I may, of course, have mislaid them in the train or somewhere else, but I think not. For safety's sake, I placed the pocket-book in an old oak cabinet on the *chiffonnier* of the bedroom I occupied at Marmyon Court, and I have no recollection of removing it. You see, we were ordered off the premises in such double-quick time that I not unnaturally forgot all about it. What had I better do? Can you recover it, or shall I write and demand it formally of your father?"

Errol could not answer this, but he rejoined, wth a look of alarm, "Why, doctor, that—that surely is corroborative evidence against us both. Damning evidence, I might call it."

"Faugh! I repeat, Errol, you are morbidly apprehensive. What can they bring in against me, still less against you? They can allege that I engaged to communicate typhoid to your brother. That is not enough. Let them prove that I have done so."

"But, doctor, two and two make four."

"Not in court; not with a jury; not with a judge. You can't hang a man for covenanting to murder you, you can only hang him if you prove he did murder. Here the chief link in the chain is missing, and can never be supplied."

"And you are prepared to risk the chance of being gibbeted, of its being demonstrated conclusively that there is a moral certainty of your being the actual cause of a man's death, and that, too, in consideration of a bribe of fifty thousand pounds?"

"You speak plainly, Errol," retorted Dr. Lembic, dryly.

"It's the right time for plain speech," groaned Errol, in reply.

Dr. Lembic walked across to the spaniel meditatively, and began to examine the corpse he had been so enjoyably dissecting ever since he had swallowed his dinner.

"This brute," he observed, "will simply cheat the devil of his due if she remains crucified any longer, and I shall want her to-morrow, and the next day, too, if she can be got to last out. Here, my dear fellow, just help me to release her, and then we will go upstairs and have a cup of coffee and a glass of liqueur. I think I know how to act so as to save this precious Planny of yours, and avoid all unpleasantness, not to say risk. So, make your mind easy; now."

Errol ground his teeth at the interruption to their conversation. But Dr. Lembic was one of those men who coolly take their own course, and persist in meeting your wishes on their own lines, not on yours. Hence there was no alternative but to obey his behests.

"Is she vicious?" asked Errol, as he prepared to remove the gag from the dog's mouth, having previously loosened the straps that held her.

"Not one little bit. A sweet-tempered brute that, before she took it into her foolish head to add to the population; used to collect the blind fellow's coppers, and lead him about the streets. The man

was fond of her, too, and they had to tell him a taradiddle about finding her a comfortable home in a gentleman's family before he'd part with her at all. Really the amount of driveling sentimentality one meets with at every turn is simply nauseating. Whoa! steady, my lass! don't bite, whatever you do. There, now you're free, and can enjoy your saucer of milk. Poor old girl!" patting her back gently as he placed her on the floor. "You shall have some more knife to-morrow!" And he laughed loud, as though he heartily relished his own brutal wit.

The poor, dazed, smarting, aching thing, that had been all its little life so true and noble a friend of our bestial species, no sooner was it released from its bands and gag than its first thought was of its little ones. With a strange, agonized hollow croon in its throat it staggered to the corner where they were huddled together in terror around their bleeding and dying brother and began to lick, not its own reeking side and bared breasts, but the cruel wounds of its offspring, while the poor hungry pups crowded round their mother and inflicted fresh tortures upon her in seeking for the teats and breasts that had been cut away recklessly and ruthlessly for the amusement of a monster.

"By Jove!" roared Dr. Lembic, who had been again washing his hands, *à la* Pilate, "look at those little beggars! Their noses are red with the old woman's blood. Fine moral that. I've known in this University certain grown-up babies thus to absorb their mother's life-blood, that is, her little money. Pshaw! dogs and men, puppies and undergrads, it's all the same. We worship the almighty 'self.' That is our one god."

"But the mother don't seem selfish," remarked Errol.

"Well, no. Mothers are not so as a rule, when their babies are concerned, but it's all an illusion. They cannot shake off the idea that the brats are part of themselves. It's merely a form of self-love, is this much vaunted natural affection. However, not to moralize overmuch, let us ascend to the upper regions."

Dr. Lembic, though not a rich man, was by no means a poor man. He held several appointments of academical character which yielded him an ample income for a bachelor, and enabled him also to be prodigal of the animals whom he "used" in his private laboratory. Hence his home was handsome, though not spacious, and well, though not sumptuously, appointed. The trade of torture yielded sufficient profit to make life easy, albeit it stopped short of luxury. A smart man-servant brought some excellent coffee, plus the Oxonian adjunct of anchovy toast, and with it a choice of white curaçoa or noyau, nectar fit for Mephistopheles.

"Now," said he, lolling in his cozy arm-chair, "to revert to this rather unpleasant topic. I can form an accurate notion of what is retarding your brother's recovery. Before I left I administered a formula, which I was fully aware would enable a man of his constitutional toughness to surmount the crisis, for I may tell you that the form of typhoid fever proved to be—contrary to my expectations, I own—the reverse of virulent. That formula ought to have been repeated. If it were repeated I am morally certain that even now his great strength would conquer the disease. Shadfort would prescribe it if he guessed what was the matter."

"Why not wire this formula—at once?"

"Gently, gently, not so fast. I hesitate to interfere with Shadfort, and indeed to do so, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, would perhaps create a bad impression. But there is no reason why you should not wire to Sir Robert, and it happens that by this expedient we shall learn where the missing pocket-book really is. I mean whether it was left behind at Marmyon, or whether it was dropped accidentally in some railway-carriage, or on the platform of one of the stations. Listen, the formula to which I allude is marked 'B,' and is in my pocket-book. If the pocket-book was left at Marmyon, doubtless it has fallen into your father's hands, and he has obtained possession of those promissory notes. If it has not been left there, then in response to your telegram they will wire for the formula, and I will send it."

"But had you not better send it at once, as it is a matter of life and death? The risk is too heavy, surely."

"No; I will not. It is now after ten o'clock. You may wire, if you will, to-night; but, as you know, the message will not be delivered at Marmyon before the morning, for in the rural districts they have no notion of the value of time. We should thus get a wire in response to-morrow within an hour of the time of its delivery, and they at their end might reply in even less time. Hence the actual delay would be at the outside a hundred minutes; and, relapse or no relapse, Mr. Plantagenet is not going to sink so soon as all that. It would take the best part of a week to finish him—three days, at the very least."

As the reader is already aware, the wire was dispatched in the terms suggested by Dr. Lembic, but with one emendation by Errol, who sent it off. Instead of emanating from Errol himself, it was dispatched in the name of Dr. Lembic, and thus at once secured attention. Further, as Sir Robert did not send a return message, both Dr. Lembic and Errol opined rightly that the pocket-book was at Marmyon Court, and in the baronet's safe custody; and this thought so exhilarated the doctor that he dissected the blind man's dog to death with a gladsome and thankful heart.

Phenomena, however, affect different people in different ways. What is one man's meat is another man's poison, and news which will frighten one out of his seven senses will reassure another. Consequently, when Sir Robert sent no reply to a wire which appeared so immensely important, Errol, shaking in every limb, implored Dr. Lembic to write out the formula, and after much argument got his own way. Then he took the prescription to a local chemist, had it made up, and with it started by an afternoon train for Marmyon. "It matters not a rush," he said to himself, "whether I give deadly offense to my father. If I can save Planny's accursed life I will be content with anything—poverty, hard work, ay, Manitoba, if that's all."

He arrived at the station with his light Gladstone bag, and was walking quickly toward the village through which he must pass in order to reach the Court, when at the turn of the narrow lane he cannoned against a man of his own height and build.

"Confound you, what do you mean by getting in my way?"

It was dark, and but for his voice he would not have been recog-

nized; as it was, he felt his coat-collar gripped tight, and his progress absolutely arrested.

"You're Mr. Errol," said a voice with which he thought he was familiar.

"I am; and you'd best leave me alone, whoever you may be."

"I am Robert Hodge. What do you want here, Mr. Errol?"

"Dash your infernal impudence, do you dare to catechise me? Hands off, or it will be the worse for you."

But the hands were not taken off. On the contrary, their grip was tightened, while his struggles to escape only landed him in the hedge at the roadside—a rather humiliating situation.

"You will go back from whence you came," muttered Robert between his teeth. "No nonsense with me. I know what you're here for. I know your murderous game, Mr. Errol."

At once the hands of the accused fell in front of him, and he dropped his bag, which fell with a crash on the ground like as of broken glass. The precious medicine was spilled.

"I don't understand you, Robert Hodge."

"Then the sooner we understand each other, sir, the better. You've a lot of the villain in your composition, you have. You've tried to get over my girl, Polly, you know you have."

"Faugh! Fiddle-stick!"

"You went to the Marmyon Arms and wanted to persuade my mother to cut me adrift. You know you did."

"I warned her of the risk she was running. That was all."

"And a nasty piece of malicious, designing interference, too; but the wrong you've done me, Mr. Errol, is a trifle compared with what you've done with your brother."

"Folly, folly, Robert; you must be off your head. Let me go, man, and I'll make it worth your while."

"What!" hissed Robert. "Do you think to bribe me? Your father has tried the same game, but it won't pay. I know what I know, sir. I heard what you and that devil of a doctor were arranging between the pair of you up by the charcoal shanty in Flesset underwood, and I mean to put a rope round your neck, Mr. Errol. So don't trifle with me. I'm your master."

At these words Errol trembled. They were of the nature of a sudden and hideous revelation. To reply was an impossibility. He could only whine piteously, "Let me go, Robert. I must reach the Court at once. My brother's life depends upon it."

"That's what I say," retorted Robert, stoutly; "and it being so, to the Court you do not go. Now, sir?"

Errol reflected a second. Then he thought, "If only I could wriggle out of his grip, I am the faster runner of the two." So he quietly remarked, "If I am to remain here all night, perhaps you will permit me to smoke?" and forthwith he lighted a cigar.

"You will not stop here," observed Robert, who, however, was a little dubious how to move him. "You will go back to Oxford College, and keep clear of this place—or—"

Puff—puff. "Or what, if you please?"

"Or I'll lay my information against you, and subpœna Sir Robert as a witness. That's what I'll do, so help me Bob!"

The cigar fell out of Errol's lips. "You infernal meddling, eavesdropping, spying scoundrel!" he hissed at him venomously.

"Stow that, Mr. Errol, or I shall land you one you won't like."

"I don't care what you do," cried Errol, peevishly, in his impotent wrath. "All I can tell you is that I've brought some medicine in my bag here to save my brother, and that nothing else can save him except that. The London doctor's at fault. He does not realize the mischief. I do, and I mean to save his life—if for no other reason, Robert Hodge, at all events for the sake of my own neck. Now, do you understand?"

Robert faltered. This was candid enough.

"If you'll give me the stuff," he said, "and let it be submitted to the London doctor for him to say 'Yes,' or 'No,' to it, good! I won't interfere further if you'll do that, Mr. Errol."

"Is that a bargain?" asked Errol, distrustfully.

"It is, on my oath. I've no thought except to stop mischief."

"I'll take you at your word; there's my bag, on the ground; you can carry it for me up to the Marmyon Arms. Your mother must make me up a bed somehow. I'm not going to the Court. In fact, if it were not for this medicine I should not be here at all to-day, and anyhow I expect it is my last visit for many a long day."

Robert said nothing, but lifted the bag, and the two trudged together to the little village inn at Marmyon.

Mrs. Hodge had been at the Court all day, so Belinda averred. She went up early in the morning with Mrs. Gipps, and had not returned as yet; but a rumor had got about that the patient was ever so much worse—indeed, sinking fast.

"Confound it," exclaimed Errol, in an angry tone, as he sat down and warmed himself at the back parlor fire. "Here, Robert, give me the bag." And he opened it hurriedly, to find, however, the medicine spilled among his linen. He had come all the way from Oxford simply to bring that saving draught, and he was foiled It was indeed heart-rending.

"Ah," he cried, "the prescription!" feeling in his bag. "Yes; here it is soused with this fluid. But that's no matter. They can get it made up if they send one of the grooms in the dog-cart. Quick; a bit of paper, girl"—this to Belinda—"and a pen. I'll scribble a note, and you, Robert, must take it for me. Sharp, girl, sharp!"

In less time than it takes to tell, the note was written and addressed to Lady Marmyon, and Robert Hodge was running off to the Court as fast as his legs could carry him, Errol having entreated him not only to lose no time, since Plantagenet's life might depend upon his celerity, but also to return as quickly as he could, inasmuch as he, Errol, was burning with impatience for the latest bulletin.

As soon as this fleet-footed Mercury was departed Errol lighted a cigar, pulled a society paper out of his pocket, and waited. An hour passed, and still Robert did not return; yet another, and there was no sign of him. Miss Belinda yawned, and asseverated that something "offul" must have happened to keep our Robert, as he was allers a man of his word. There was nobody to send; and besides this the messengers, like those of Ahab to Jehu, went but came not again.

"I can't bear it any longer!" gasped Errol, when closing-time ar-

rived and the house was being shut up for the night. "Come what may, I shall go myself." And he took up his hat, and in dubiety and intense mental disquietude walked up to his old home, Marmyon Court.

CHAPTER XII.

PATERNAL LOVE.

When Mrs. Hodge, the middle-aged but hypertrophied, had contrived, with the aid of Mrs. Gipps, the aged, tottering, yet spare woman, to roll herself up to the Court, she first sought the sanctum of Mrs. Hester Mazebrook. Thereunto gravitated habitually all that was respectable, decorous, and independent; other and interior people, especially those who added to a slender income by washing, being considered by her unfit for anything superior to the servants' hall.

Mrs. Mazebrook, as became a woman on the reverse side of forty, and the dispenser of stores to so grand an establishment, had cultivated the airs and graces which adorned her predecessor, though at heart a very modest and humble person. Hence she received Mrs. Hodge with dignity, and Mrs. Gipps, as being a humbler and less independent individual, patronizingly.

"'Ow is the patient, mum, do you ast? Thank you, mum, I think he's no better. His mind, they tells me, is steadier, and Sir Robert have sent for some new medicine as is going to work wonders—leastways, if it bain't too late."

"It be too late," groaned Martha Hodge, the tears flowing apace from her eyes, and spangling Mrs. Mazebrook's drugget.

"No, no, Mrs. Hodge, you mustn't say that. It's never too late to mend. But there, mum, you allers 'ad a feeling 'eart, and poor Mr. Plantagenet, he were your foster-child."

Mrs. Hodge tried to stammer something, but failed. Then she began to sob spasmodically and choke, so that, with her rubicund face and short neck, she appeared to be in imminent peril of apoplexy. Finally, to increase that peril, Mrs. Gipps came behind her and thumped her on the back.

"She wants to see Sir Robert. She've got something very pertikler to say to him. That's what she've come about," whispered Mrs. Gipps, between the paroxysms of coughing, choking, and sobbing, in the ear of perplexed Hester Mazebrook.

"There ain't much of a chance of seeing him," replied the housekeeper. "Dr. Shadfort's gone, and is coming' back in the evening, and Sir Robert has gone to sit by Mr. Plantagenet's bedside and has given orders he's on no account to be interrupted, for you see the poor young gentleman's head's clear, and he can understand what Sir Robert says. He's ever so weak, but he ain't off his head as he was yesterday. However, Sir Robert's main sure to come down-stairs for lunch. It's a meal he likes best of any, and I'd advise Mrs. Hodge to sit down quiet and wait till then. There's 'The Morning Post,' and there's a glass of wine in the cupboard. I'm off to my duties, for Mr. Orphrey is asked to luncheon, and I believe the cause is as he is to administer the last rites of the Church. Good-morning

for the present, Mrs. Hodge; and, Mrs. Gipps, you try and make her comfortable. It be a tryin' time for us all."

What Hester Mazebrook had stated was substantially correct. Sir Robert, after his long night of anxiety, had begun to reproach himself for not having all these years taken a sufficiently paternal interest in Plantagenet, and still more for having been attracted insensibly to Errol, whom he now regarded as a reprobate, unworthy to bear the grand old family name. "Now," thought he, "the hour of Nemesis has come. I am about to lose this fine, manly magnanimous fellow, whom I have all along undervalued because of his rough and sturdy nature, and at the same moment the boy on whom in secret I, and openly my wife, have lavished affection, turns out to be a blackguard. I am justly punished; but before the silver cord is broken I will make what amends lies in my power, so that if he is spared he shall be assured of my deep affection, and if he is taken he will leave us with the full knowledge of being mourned for and lamented as one we have really loved."

Yet there was one other thought that rather oppressed the baronet's mind. Ought he, or ought he not, to disclose Errol's treachery? Had he kept his head cool, the answer common-sense would have given to his query would have been a decided negative. As it was he was simply effervescing with repentance, and fancied that, by making a clean confession of Errol's sin, he should somehow atone for his own neglect.

It was in this state of mind that he sought the sick-chamber of unfortunate Plantagenet.

The young man, with his bandaged face and broken arm, lay solemnly on the bed, calm, with blanched lips and a terrible look of exhaustion. As Sir Robert entered, he seemed hardly to recognize him; but by degrees his eye regained its intelligence, and when his sire took his hand lovingly he faintly smiled.

"My dearest," cried Sir Robert, "I hope, we all hope and pray, that your dear life may be spared, for your own sake as well as for ours. Ah, Planny, you have thought me a cold, a stern, an unsympathetic parent, but at heart I am not so. I am grieved beyond all speech, my dearest, to see you thus. You are my pride and my hope. I could die for you, Planny!"

Plantagenet Marmyon turned to look at the baronet. Was he dreaming? Could this be the language of that chilling, repellent father who had always set his detested younger brother over his head. He must be dreaming, he felt sure.

Nevertheless, when his father pressed his hand he returned the pressure, being in truth not a little touched by these strange words of unlooked-for love.

"Planny, if I have seemed cold, if I have neglected my duty to you, then I ask, dear boy, your pardon. I ask it humbly; I ask it earnestly."

There were tears now in the baronet's eyes, and tears on the baronet's cheeks, and his voice, ususally so crisp and firm, sounded broken and unsteady. The father was humiliating himself even to the dust and Plantagenet knew it, as he whispered, "There is nothing to forgive. You have always been most earnest for my welfare. Rather it is I who ought to ask your pardon, for—"

"No, no, Planny, you have been a model son. I have never found fault with you in my heart, except, perhaps, as regards manners, but that's of no consequence. I'm sure no father was ever blessed with a nobler son than you have been to me, and—and—I could not bear to lose you, Planny. I pray every hour that you may be spared."

"Has the doctor given me up?"

"No, no, a thousand times no. You will have some fresh medicine shortly, and we have great hopes that it will prove the true panacea."

Plantagenet Marmyon closed his eyes. He read Sir Robert's optimism between the lines, and formed his own conclusion.

"Father," he whispered, and Sir Robert drew near to him. "Father, I have never loved but once. Will you tell Ida that I think of her, and that I—hope she will marry a good man; mind, a good man, father, and not Errol."

"Errol," echoed Sir Robert, paling. "Planny, shall I tell you a secret? Can you bear it? It is something you ought to know."

The sick man gave a look as much as to say I have not much power of endurance left. Spare me. But Sir Robert had made up his mind to speak, and could not spare or keep silence.

"Listen. It is a grievous thing for a father to have to tell a son, but I dare not keep this secret from you. Your complaint is, as you know, typhoid."

"Yes!" exclaimed Plantagenet, with sudden firmness.

"And—and I fear—that is, I think—that is, I have reason to believe that Errol, my son Errol, Planny, suborned that scoundrel Lembic to communicate the disease to you. You are the victim."

And the poor man hid his face in his hands in overwhelming shame.

"So," murmured the deep, sepulchral voice of Plantagenet—"so, my brother would murder me for my love and my inheritance. He shall not succeed! By my love for Ida, he shall not!" And he raised himself in the bed and clinched his fist.

"Planny, dearest Planny, this is madness. This is suicide, Planny. If you would cheat that unutterable blackguard, my son, whom I have disowned and cast adrift, you must be calm. Excite yourself, and you play his game for him only too well."

"Yes," gasped the sick man, feebly; "that is right. I will be calm. Give me the new medicine as soon as ever it comes."

And he closed his eyes.

"Planny, dearest, you trust me now, don't you? You realize that you are my only, my dearly loved son, and that if anything happens I am indeed a childless man, and my name, if it does not perish, is dishonored."

"Yes, father, I trust you; I honor you; I love you. And if I were to be called before the bar of eternal justice I would declare that my errors are my own, for my father has been always true and always good."

This utterance of one whom Sir Robert, in his inmost soul, took to be a dying man, was all the more ineffably touching because conscience told him it was all undeserved. Here was a simple heart paying the largest tribute to the hypocrisy of long years which only

at the supreme crisis had been metamorphosed—and then, too, very much by an accident—into sincere affection.

A knock at the door and Nurse Pratling entered with the medicine, which having been duly administered, that judicious woman cast an eye on the patient, and then remarked, significantly: "Pulse higher nor it were an hour ago; eye brighter; breathing less easy. You've been taking too much out of him, Sir Robert, by your long talk. Suppose we was to try now a bit of quiet and rest. It might do good, and, besides, Mr. Orphrey, that is the clergyman, so they tells me, have been waiting to see you in the library this 'arf-hour or more."

Sir Robert extracted a pocket-handkerchief, blew his nose, wiped his eyes, and then muttered 'Yes, nurse, yes; quite right. Bless you, my boy"—turning to the bed—"and may you be preserved for your poor father's sake!"

And stooping down he kissed the sick man's clammy forehead reverently, while in the return poor Planny took his hand and pressed it to his lips calmly, but in truth lovingly.

"Good-by, Planny."

"Good-by, father."

Then the baronet, the tears forcing their way as though they would not stop, hurried down-stairs, and, nothing ashamed, grasped the thin, pale hand of the vicar.

"Orphrey," he cried, in a lamentable voice, "it is indeed an awful thing to lose a son, and if you knew all, if I dared tell you all, my dear friend, you would indeed say that a horrible judgment has fallen on this house."

"You may tell me, Sir Robert," replied the vicar, in his own cold, restrained way, yet not unkindly for him. "I am a priest, and would die rather than break the seal of confession."

"For shame's sake I dare not, Mr. Orphrey."

"If what you have to say refers to the mental condition of the man who you fear—pray that it may not be so—is about to pass away, then it would be wrong to conceal it from me, however disagreeable the revelation may be to make."

"I hardly know how to act. Sooner or later if not to-day, to-morrow—all depends on Dr. Shadfort's fiat—I may have to request you to administer the last sacrament to my poor son."

"Yes; and to hear his last, perhaps his only confession."

"Mr. Orphrey he has been done the most grievous wrong that a man can receive from the hands of his fellow. That, however, is his misfortune, not his fault."

"Yes, my dear Sir Robert, that may be so; but here a further question arises: Can he, after enduring a wrong of the sort you outline, sincerely forgive his malefactor?"

"Ah! yes. There, I own, is the rub. I could not; and that's the truth."

"Then, Sir Robert, you would imperil your soul."

"Do you believe that?"

"I must believe it. It is my creed; the very essence of my creed; the fine flower of the garden of the soul. Besides, it is true."

Sir Robert took a turn round the room, then he faced the meek-eyed, ascetic priest, and paused inquiringly.

"If I pour dirty water into your vessel it will not leak?"

"It will not; it cannot. Personally, I and my colleagues would rather have the vessels of our memory surcharged with crystal streams than with foul and putrid sewage. But it is not to be. We have to hold all and never to lose a drop. You and I are not now in a confessional, but all secrets confided to us priests in our spiritual character, as the representatives of our Master, are confessions, and as such we have, to the rest of mankind, no knowledge of them. They are sealed, so that the seal cannot be broken."

"Good. Then, Mr. Orphrey, lend me your ear. My tale is one that seems to burn my tongue or freeze it, to rend my heart and cover me with shame. It has laid mine honor in the dust." And slowly, painfully, yet with faithful exactitude, Sir Robert divulged his miserable secret.

"Cruel; intensely wicked; hideously selfish, but just what I might have expected from a disciple of Paul Bert. Eliminate belief—that is, the sense of responsibility to a Power that can punish—and you convert man into an animal, with all the coagulated vices of the animal creation, with the venom of the serpent, the cruelty of the tiger or the cat, the wrath of the lion, the bestiality and cunning of the monkey, the gluttony of the pig. That demon Lembic has unconsciously vivisected himself. He has excised completely that quality which we Christians term conscience, and instead thereof has inserted in his strange composition a subtle quality borrowed from the Father of Lies. As for your son—"

"He is no son of mine. I disown him."

"No. He is your son. He is bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh. You cannot abrogate your responsibility. You have permitted him to associate with a talented wretch whose sole happiness consists in barbarity to God's creatures, and then you blame him for the conclusion that follows logically from that premiss. Blame yourself, or at all events, share the blame with the sinner."

"It was an oversight on my part, Mr. Orphrey."

"Yes; and nearly all the misery in the world is caused by oversights. This oversight of yours, Sir Robert, which you will pardon my terming willful blindness, has perhaps robbed you of one son and estranged you from the other. And I am all the more surprised at you giving your sanction to the crimes of the vivisectors against creation, because you are too true a sportsman to be cruel, and too much of a Tory to be in sympathy with the atheistic, communistic crew, who would cram down our throats the ethics and the cruelties of Frenchmen, such as the typical assailant of Catholicism, the notorious Bert. I am not a sportsman, for I shrink from killing, holding perhaps an exaggerated reverence for the sublime gift of life, and I am assuredly no Tory, but rather a Democrat, so far as theory goes, yet I am angrily opposed to vivisection, whereas you have accepted that which is a sin against God and his creation, on the ground of sophistical expediency."

"And I am punished," said Sir Robert, rising. "Punished, aye, crushed to death. Come, friend, let me give you some luncheon. Afterward we shall hear what the effect of the new medicine is, and whether it will be desirable for you to see poor Planny to-day, or defer your interview until to-morrow. *Allons!*"

Lady Marmyon was present at the social meal, but silent. She had rather affected the *malade imaginaire*, albeit there was nothing at all the matter with her, in order to escape the *gêne* of nursing the sick man. But though she shirked her duty—as most people would have called it—she otherwise preserved the unities, pulling a long face, upturning her rather weak eyes to the ceiling, and talking in the most awfully subdued tones. "Poor dear Planny!" she murmured, elongating the "poor" and the "dear" till they sounded like "Poo-ar" "dee-ar," "he was always such a fond creature, just like a big St. Bernard dog, Mr. Orphrey! But"—sigh—"the threads of life and those of death seem in this world to be inexplicably tangled. Still we have hope left us. Indeed, Dr. Shadfort was almost encouraging."

"Nothing of the kind, my dear," protested her husband. "Quite the other way. In fact"—lowering his voice to a whisper—"I am all but hopeless."

"That is not my view," protested Lady Marmyon, with pursy dignity, as though the decrees of Heaven hung upon her fiat.

"If you please, Sir Robert," here interposed, in a stage-whisper, the ministering flunkey, "Mrs. Hodge have sent a message that she wants to see you on very particular business."

"Er—ah! Yes! Er—ah, no! Tell the woman Hodge I really cannot at this moment be bothered with her or her affairs. Er—ah—it's unconscionable!"

"That woman Hodge," remarked Mr. Orphrey, severely, "is the curse of the parish. I wish with all my heart her vile drink-shop were closed for evermore."

"Er—ah, yes," replied Sir Robert, dubiously, reflecting perhaps on the fact that the Marmyon Arms added something to his yearly rent roll, a consideration he was not prepared, even on religious grounds, to overlook.

So the conversation changed; nevertheless, before the repast was ended the persistent flunky returned to the charge, having in fact been incited thereunto by a *largesse* of five shillings from the aforesaid Martha Hodge.

"If you please," Sir Robert, "Mrs. Hodge she asts your very humble parding, Sir Robert, but she says, Sir Robert, as see you she must, inasmuch as it's a matter of life and death and won't wait."

"Really—er—ah," protested Sir Robert, turning to Mr. Orphrey and sipping his claret, "the pertinacity and intrusiveness of the lower orders surpasses all comprehension. Here am I with my poor son lying in the most critical state upstairs—a matter of life and death, indeed and in truth, as this impudent woman puts it—and yet I must be pestered with her chatter. No, I will not humor her. She has no conscience."

"But," pleaded Lady Marmyon, "perhaps Martha Hodge wishes to see poor Planny. It would be only natural, for she nursed him as a baby. Don't you think—"

"Er—ah, as you like, my dear. Here, William, go and tell Mrs. Hodge that if she wishes to see Mr. Plantagenet, and Nurse Pratling will give her permission, she has my leave to enter his room for a minute only—mind, only one minute, and there is to be no scene. Tell her that."

"Yes, Sir Robert."

But in a trice William returned with the message that Mrs. Hodge must see Sir Robert, and that nobody else would do.

"Upon my honor!" cried the baronet, flushing indignantly.

"And she begged me to add with her humble duty, Sir Robert," faltered the man, who was conscious of trespassing, "that if she don't see you this very day it's no good."

"Then," replied the baronet, "it will have to be no good, for my attention is preoccupied. The answer, William, is no!"

"You are rather hard, Robert," remarked Lady Marmyon, perhaps for simple contradiction, adding, with a sort of scornful smile, "what is your opinion, Mr. Orphrey?"

"Well," replied the vicar, "I never volunteer criticism, Lady Marmyon, unless it is specially invited."

"If you think I ought to see her as a matter of duty—of duty," said Sir Robert, addressing the vicar, "why, then, I will—er—ah—try to put my feelings in my pocket."

"It might be advisable," responded Mr. Orphrey, hesitatingly.

"Very well. In that case, William, you may tell Hodge that I will send for her when I want her. She can wait."

And so, after much pertinacity, Martha Hodge got her way.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BASE CONSPIRACY.

Martha Hodge had to exercise the virtue of patience, and to trust to hope long deferred, for no sooner had Mr. Orphrey departed (Mrs. Pratling having petitioned that her patient should not be disturbed by the clergyman, as she believed in her heart the new medicine was already doing him a power of good) than the baronet insisted on taking his seat by the sick-bed, where he remained with limpet-like pertinacity hour after hour, in expectation that each train would bring down Dr. Shadfort.

At last he retired, and, sick at heart, sat down in the library.

It was nine o'clock at night, and Mrs. Hodge's wait had lasted nearly twelve hours. No wonder, therefore, on learning from William that master was alone at last, so resolute a woman should have taken the bull by the horns and with French leave introduced herself. As the door opened, Sir Robert involuntarily gazed at the intruder, but his visage was blank, and he really hardly realized her identity. His mind was surcharged with the calamity which he fully anticipated was imminent, and all thought for other people had been eliminated from his brain by the dull sense of apprehension caused thereby.

"I beg your pardon—humbly I beg it—Sir Robert, but I've been sitting in Mrs. Mazebrook's room all day, and as you was alone I ventured to come in without asking."

"You find me, my good soul," replied the baronet, in a low sad tone, "preoccupied and crushed. There is, I am morally convinced, no hope. Till this evening I cherished the illusion that Dr. Lembic's prescription would turn the scale—I had, indeed, reason for thinking so. But I am now of the contrary opinion. I have dis-

missed illusions. My son, my noble-hearted son, Mrs. Hodge, is, I fear, doomed. It is cruel, cruel, cruel!"

Martha Hodge stared hard at him, slowly grasped his meaning, and uttered a hysterical shriek, her huge overfed frame shaking wih emotion. She made, however, a grand effort to contain herself, and was about to utter, when Sir Robert, who was not a little astonished at this exhibition on her part of intense emotion, remarked, quietly, "Are we partners in pain, then, Mrs. Hodge?"

"Sir—Robert," gasped the woman slowly, rocking herself as she spoke, much as if the words could only be extracted by violent muscular exertion, "you have less reason to take on than me, though you don't know it."

"Mrs. Hodge—this is enigmatical," cried Sir Robert, in a tone of offense. "You don't seem to weigh your words."

"Oh, yes, I do. I've been thinking all day what to say and how to say it, and if you can't now understand how it is that I'm the real one to suffer, the more's the pity. The wonder to my mind is that it hain't been plain to your eyes for these many years."

The attention of Sir Robert was by now fully aroused, and he walked across the room and sat down by the side of Martha Hodge, fixing his eye firmly and inquiringly upon her.

"Hey, what's this? You must drop mystery, woman, and speak what's in your mind. Come, no equivocating, no shirking. You are here for a purpose; in one word, what is that purpose?"

Martha Hodge was rather taken aback by the imperious tone of her lord and ruler. At another moment it would have repelled confidence and closed her mouth, now, however, it only for the instant staggered her; it did not daunt her.

"My will," she answered, "is to do justice, at all costs. I may put a rope round my neck for what I can tell; I may send myself to prison. But I don't care that for myself. Sir Robert, you think the sick man up-stairs is your son and your wife's son?"

"Of course I do, Mrs. Hodge. And he is so."

"Is he? Is he like you? Is he like my lady? Ain't children in feature and in form somewhat of the same sort as them as brings 'em into the world? Sir Robert, will you oblige me by lookin' careful at that photograph?"

The baronet snatched it out of her hand rudely, took it to the lamp, and at a glance said, "Yes; it's poor Planny, but a bad likeness and in a singular dress. What's the meaning of all this rigmarole and nonsense, woman?"

"Look at it again, Sir Robert. No, look at the back. Is there ever a date to it?"

"Why, woman, it's your husband, John Hodge, as a young man!"

Mrs. Hodge said nothing, but cast her eyes down.

"What do you wish me to infer from this picture and your words?"

"What, Sir Robert? Why—to be sure—the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. This day—this day when I am humbled to the dust, when all hope for the child of my body is taken from me, I repent my deceit, and though it be late, confess it."

Sir Robert gripped her fat arm violently. "You do not speak

the truth," he said. "You do but insinuate. You dare not utter the lie you have basely—at this cruel crisis—come here to suggest."

But Mrs. Hodge no sooner felt the collar than her eyes dried, and her spirit rose to the occasion. "Sir Robert," she replied, with calm assurance, "if I've tried to break the news, 'tis on your account, not on mine. But if you will have it straight, I tell you this, and I'll prove it too, that Plantagenet Marmyon is Plantagenet Hodge, son of John and Martha Hodge!"

"Your—your—son!" in a tone of horror and disgust.

"And that Robert Hodge is the son of Sir Robert and Lady Marmyon, being as like his father as one pea is to another pea."

Sir Robert clasped his hands epileptically, while his lips moved in a strange mechanical fashion. But he could not speak.

"Well," cried Martha, impatiently, "ain't that good news for you? Ain't it awful for me? Isn't a live son, though he be a working-man, better than one as is all but a corpse? Trust me, Sir Robert, if there was a shred of hope I'd never have spoke. All these years I've had no thought for self, only for him and his welfare, and I did hope as he, my own boy, would have been a great man and a happy one. But as it ain't to be, as wickedness never yet did prosper, I'm not going to let that there Errol win his game. Not me, Sir Robert. My son's death lies at Errol's door, and I know it, thanks to Robert, and for telling that Robert shall have his own."

"Yes," muttered the baronet, in the most sepulchral of basses, "but—the proof? You ignore the proof."

"You wish for proof? You ain't afraid of facing it?"

Sir Robert reflected long—dubiously—meditatively.

"Yes," he reiterated as though thinking aloud, "in a case of this sort it is right to listen, be the consequences what they may. But I warn you fairly, Mrs. Hodge, that in giving attention to your asseveration I do not for a second admit its validity. Changing children in the cradle is a very stale trick indeed, and one not to be expected in real life. Nevertheless, as you choose to accuse yourself of a very gross and abominable fraud, I am virtually compelled to hear your confession and its corroboration, if any. Now!" and he folded his hands and closed his eyes.

Martha Hodge felt her veracity challenged. She had, in her simplicity of soul—not being a woman much given to sifting evidence, but judging by the impulse of the moment, on the principle that feminine perception is infallible—imagined that the photograph would amount to proof positive. As it was, she perceived that her story was *ab initio* discredited, and her resolve was taken then and there to convince the stubborn intellect of one who, as she supposed, refused to be convinced because of unwillingness, not for conscience' sake.

"Very well, Sir Robert," she answered, wiping her mouth with the corner of her apron. "I'll submit my proof. But before doing so you had best hear how it all came about."

"Quite so," said the baronet, in his normal, quick, crisp voice, "only I tell you in advance that it looks to me as though you were bent upon foisting your son Robert on me—that is my impression. Remove it if you can."

"Such is my desire," whined Martha, cut to the quick by the baronet's persistent incredulity. "When I were carried up to the Court to nurse your son, Sir Robert, I were taken to Mrs. Pratling's room, and Hester Mazebrook were then the under house-maid as were told off to wait upon me. I recollects every single circumstance as if it were yesterday, and so does others as well, so don't take it on my word only. When I come into Nurse Pratling's room and was laid on the bed I had my baby with me—"

"I rather doubt the accuracy of that statement," interposed Sir Robert. "If that happened my orders must have been disobeyed. However, proceed."

"I am correct," continued Martha. "My baby was laid on the bed, and presently in comes nurse with my lady's baby, and we put the two together and remarked as they had the same colored eyes and a biggish lobe to their ears. But I took a note, though I said nothing at the time, that my lady's baby had a thickening of the throat—a sort of a swelling; whereas there weren't a fault about my baby. It was just dinner-time, and Nurse Prattling said she'd go and get her dinner in the servants' hall, and send me up mine by Hester. But before she went she goes to the cupboard, fetches a bit of gold cord, and ties it round the leg of your baby, Sir Robert. A minute after nurse had left the room, Hester she went out to get my dinner. Well, I oughtn't to have moved so soon after my confinement, but I jumps off the bed, goes to the cupboard, ties a bit of that same cord round my baby's leg, changes the children's clothes, and as soon as Hester came with my dinner, I sends her off to Widow Gipps with your baby. Nurse Pratling came back later on, and being surprised at the child she thought was mine being gone, she pulls up the clothes and examines the leg of the little one. There was the gold cord, sure enough, and the proper clothes on the child's body, but she hadn't time to pay much attention, for in walked the doctor, Sir Marshall something."

"Midwinter?"

"Yes, that's the man's name: and here I had a squeak to be found out, for, says he, 'What about that swelling?' and 'How big the child have growed!' my baby being the heavier of the two by several pounds. But nurse were thinking about my lady, who was in danger of a fever or something, and she and the doctor went away, and I were left pretty much with Hester for three or four days."

"Quite so," remarked Sir Robert, dryly, "but we are no nearer the corroboration. All this, Mrs. Hodge, is your tale. It may be true; it may be an illusion of your brain; it may be—excuse me—a willful deception. Now, if you please, for witnesses other than Mrs. Hodge, who, whether she be a witness of truth or of error, is, perhaps, not free from the suspicion of being interested."

"You wrong me, Sir Robert," cried Martha, reddening almost purple. "My ambition was for my son, not for your son. I never had any love for your son. I never did right by him. I could not be his mother. He was nothing to me, and there is so little love lost between us that if he was recognized as your eldest son to-morrow he would never thank me."

"I understand. That is so far plausible. However, to revert to the point—your witnesses, Mrs. Hodge."

"First, there is Nurse Pratling. I have not spoken to her, but if you question her she will recollect the circumstances. Next there is Hester; she carried your baby, dressed in my baby's clothes, to Widow Gipps, and she saw the golden cord and pointed it out to the old woman. I have asked Mrs. Gipps about it, quite permiscuous, Sir Robert, and she has the very identical cord in her possession."

"Yes? Is that all?"

"Except the swelling. Hester Mazebrook will testify to that, and so will Mrs. Gipps, who had a job to reduce it; and if you'll ask Nurse Pratling or that London doctor they'll tell you it's no invention of mine. Last, not least, Sir Robert, the young man you call Robert Hodge has a thickening of the throat, just as you have, Sir Robert, if I may say so; and the young man upstairs as passes for your son, he's got my John's muscles and limbs, but a littlish throat for one of his stature and build."

"And that's the story?"

"Yes, except the word of the living witnesses."

Sir Robert walked to the bell and summoned William.

"Send Mrs. Pratling to me—at once."

"And Widow Gipps, young man," added Martha Hodge.

In a trice the monthly nurse entered in company with the old widow, took a seat, and whispered, confidentially, "He's asleep, poor lamb!"

"Now, Mrs. Hodge," remarked the baronet, who refused to depart from his judicial attitude a hair's breadth. "Now, you will, if you please, examine your own witnesses. It's no concern of mine to prove your case."

Mrs. Hodge bit her lip. To tackle Nurse Pratling was not easy.

So she began diplomatically: "Sir Robert wishes you to tell what you know as precisely as if you was in a court of justice. Am I right, Sir Robert?"

"Oh, yes; be particular, nurse," with affected indifference.

And so—not to cover the same ground too often—Martha Hodge extracted from Mrs. Pratling a confirmation of her asseveration in every particular, though her memory occasionally required refreshing. To her followed Widow Gipps, whose bit of dulled gold cord Mrs. Pratling owned "might be the same;" and Hester Mazebrook, who gave her evidence with directness. Having the three women before him, Sir Robert was about to submit them all to the test of a cross-examination, when to his horror there entered one as deeply interested as himself in the veracity or falsehood of the tale thus suddenly sprung upon him, Lady Marmyon.

It became then and there necessary to explain.

Lady Marmyon, however, was in no mood to hear. "What," she shrilled, turning upon Martha in as tigerish a way as was compatible with ladyhood, "do you mean to say that that clod-hopping son of yours, who has been in jail lately, is my son? Really, Robert," frowning at her husband, "I am surprised at your listening to such brazen effrontery. Can't you see that it is a conspiracy to defraud, not Plantagenet, poor fellow, but Errol?"

"I've done a wicked wrong," protested Martha; "but what I say, my lady, is the truth."

"And so," continued Lady Marmyon, scornfully, "you, Mazebrook, are a party to this vile plot. You, upon whom I have placed above others at the head of my household, and trusted implicitly. However, you know your business best, I suppose, but, of course, after this you can not remain here—no, not for an hour. Robert, you must support me in this. I am shocked and sickened at such ingratitude. Not a word from any of you, if you please. Anything you could urge would only aggravate the wrong you have done. Silence! I will not be answered. Robert, do you sit still and permit your wife to be insulted? I will not endure it."

What would have happened it is not easy to divine, for her ladyship was infuriated, but just at that juncture the footman announced that Mr. Orphrey was in the drawing-room. He had come to see the sick man.

"Oh!" cried Lady Marmyon; "then, thank Heaven, I shall have some one to say a word for me. No; none of you move! I will refer this false and fraudulent charge to the sober judgment of our clergyman. Ask Mr. Orphrey in here, William."

The priestly-looking vicar, with his ascetic face and his studied, self-contained manner, entered like Apollo to save Sir Robert from humiliation. When Juno takes to bullying Jove before all the menials of Olympus it is rather painful for the King of gods.

Lady Marmyon was about to begin, but the crisp, sharp voice of her spouse anticipated her. Sir Robert perceived the value of the first word, and made haste to secure it.

"A statement has been hazarded," he said, "by Mrs. Hodge, which has given us all infinite pain; in fact at a moment when the angel of death seems to be—"

"The angel of peace, the angel of sleep," interrupted Mrs. Pratling, vigorously. "The dear young gentleman has his chance at last. Wait till you hear what Dr. Shadfort says!"

But nobody except Martha Hodge, who gave a little start of pleasurable surprise, noticed the ejaculation of the good nurse.

"—the angel of death seems to be hovering round our very eaves," continued Sir Robert, "to be told that our dying son is not our son at all, and his brother not his next of kin. To be told also that another is our child—this amounts, you will agree with me, Mr. Orphrey, to a thunder-bolt."

"No, it doesn't," murmured Lady Marmyon, spitefully, "unless lies are hurled from the clouds."

Mr. Orphrey stood posed. This was a tableau he had little dreamed of, though as to the rest of the world it had been all along a puzzle to him how—to invert the old metaphor of Horace—leopards had generated a lion. He had to pull himself together in order to be in any degree equal to the situation, the more so because there were riveted upon him, as upon one inspired, the eyes not only of the baronet and his wife, but of Mrs. Pratling, Widow Gipps, and tearful Hester Mazebrook, who was trembling from the crown of her innocent head to the sole of her foot.

"Am I to understand that your ladyship repudiates this story that Mrs. Hodge has come forward to vouch for?"

Lady Marmyon bowed.

"It is one which, I take it, implicates its author seriously, and had better be left for the courts of law to decide upon."

"Oh, no!" cried Lady Marmyon, petulantly. "Nothing of that kind. I don't propose to treat it seriously."

"That depends," remarked Sir Robert, with emphasis.

"On me!" thrilled Mrs. Hodge, who had been sitting on thorns, and was resolved to brave Lady Marmyon.

Sir Robert cast a glance on his wife, as much as to say, "we can not avoid that conclusion," but Lady Marmyon in response shrugged her shoulders. She thought Sir Robert a weak fool, who might crush a conspiracy under the iron heel of despotism, if only he possessed the necessary virility.

"And what proof have you, Mrs. Hodge?" drawled Mr. Orphrey.

Mrs. Hodge was about to give considerable rein to that little member of hers which could be long enough on occasions—her lingual development—when another interruption occurred, and her mouth for the nonce was closed.

William, the complacent Mercury, entered with Errol's letter, which he handed to Lady Marmyon.

But Sir Robert had caught sight, *in transitu*, of the writing, and an angry flush lit up his countenance as he asked, impulsively, "who brought this letter?"

William answered, indifferently, "Hodge, Sir Robert."

"Hodge!"

"Yes. Robert Hodge, Sir Robert."

"Is he here?"

"Yes, Sir Robert. He's in the servants' hall, waiting for an answer."

"He need not wait. I will send a reply," cried my lady, hastily.

"Stop," said Sir Robert, to whom both Errol's handwriting and the mystery environing it were most disquieting. "Tell Robert Hodge to come here—at once."

CHAPTER XIV.

LIKE TO LIKE.

Robert Hodge, with his quick, lithesome step marched straight into the library to face, not as he expected, the baronet alone, but a grouped assemblage all mute as at a Quakers' meeting. In the center at the table sat Sir Robert, to his right being Lady Marmyon and Mr. Orphrey, to his left Hester, Widow Gipps, and Martha Hodge.

As he entered, and stood at the table like Shakespeare before the justice of the peace, Sir Robert addressed him quietly, yet with the semblance of ill-usage.

"I have sent for you," he said, "because we have been informed just now by your—ahem—mother, your reputed mother, that you stand to us in relation of claimant; that in future we must regard you as one who aspires to be recognized by us."

If Sir Robert had delivered himself of a sentence in High Dutch, or had spoken the gibberish which the Irvingites interpret as the

language of the other world, Robert Hodge could not have looked more unutterably puzzled.

"Claimant!" he echoed. "What do I claim? Nothing, Sir Robert. I've only one thought in the future—America!"

"The boy don't know nothing, Sir Robert," pleaded Martha Hodge. "Let I tell 'un."

"Be good enough to keep silence," said Sir Robert, sternly, adding, "Young man, is it the fact that you are ignorant of the claims put forward on your behalf by that woman there?"

Robert glanced round angrily at Mrs. Hodge. Then he replied, impatiently, "I've no idea what you're talking about. Whatever Mrs. Hodge has asked for on my account, she's asked without my leave, and against my will. I don't ask."

"She has not asked!" remarked the baronet. "She has demanded. She has entered a claim. I had better tell him what it is, had I not, Mr. Orphrey?"

"It can do no harm," responded the clergyman.

"The claim," said Sir Robert, with solemnity, "is this, that you are not the son of John and Martha Hodge, but of myself and Lady Marmyon, and, as a corollary, that my son, who is up-stairs between life and death, is hers."

Robert Hodge drew a long deep breath, smiled faintly, then resumed his aspect of quiet defiance.

"This is new to me," he replied, "and I don't know how to take it, for even if it be true, and not a dream occasioned by gin-and-water, I'm not fit to be your son or her ladyship's. I'm better qualified to seek my fortune across the Atlantic, and I'd rather do so than fasten myself on to people of your sort, Sir Robert. Do not, therefore, let the notion trouble your mind. There's in all likelihood nothing in it, and if there is I'm not the man to take advantage of it. Sir Robert and Lady Marmyon, if you happen to be my father and mother, pray do not suppose I forget that there's a gulf between us. I am one of the people. You are of a class that is apart, and depend on it I would never shame you."

Sir Robert's countenance was a study as he heard this proud avowal. Every syllable of it seemed to confirm the allegation of Martha Hodge. Moreover there was a something in the young fellow's expression which reminded him insensibly of the looking-glass of twenty-five years ago. The resemblance, too, he remembered, had struck him before ever he had a suspicion of the youth's identity, and now seemed to appeal vehemently to his conscience. He was for the nonce dumb, nonplussed, stupefied.

But Lady Marmyon hastened to the rescue. She knew her husband's temper. She knew of old that while he would screw his tenants and begrudge his laborers their wage, when his sense of honor was touched he was softer than a Bayard. "The young man," she observed, "speaks very properly. He deserves our esteem for his spirit of independence."

"Yes," added Mr. Orphrey, glibly, "I'm sure Robert would be the very last to take his stand on an imaginary right."

"He can do as he likes," cried Martha Hodge. "If he's too silly to hold his own more's the pity. And you, my lady, must please yourself about denying your own flesh and blood. I've done my

duty, and all I have to say is, if you gentle people didn't come and force poor working women to throw aside nature and abandon their babes just born for the sake of your little uns, there'd be no temptation ever put in the way of such as I was. Robert—there's your father, and there's your mother. It's truth, Robert; and I've robbed you of them all these years. They won't own to you, Robert, that I know; but if you baint worse than an idiot you won't release them. They are yours to hold, with the reversion of every stick in this house, and all their broad acres."

"You hear her, Robert Hodge?" sneered the baronet, who was piqued at being thus bearded. "You hear her, and, if you are as wise as you are well intentioned, you will not heed her insane words. My poor son Plantagenet may yet—"

"Dr. Shadfort!"

And in bowled that illustrious physician, all bustle, having missed his train at Victoria, and eager to get back.

He barely had time to shake hands with Lady Marmyon when Martha Hodge walked up to him, and, placing her hand on his arm, said: "Will you, as a favor to me, doctor, cast an eye on that young man there, and on Sir Robert, and say if they are at all made alike?"

The challenge was bold, impudent, intrusive, but Sir Robert was not the man to refuse it. "Humor the woman," he said, "if you will, doctor."

Dr. Shadfort scrutinized the elder and the younger man critically with the eye of a physiognomist. Then he made them both right-about-face, and noted the cerebellum and neck of each carefully, wondering in his mind whether this was or was not an illegitimate son of the baronet, and whether he cared to repudiate him.

"Well," asked Sir Robert, "do you perceive any similarity of conformation between us? I want your candid opinion."

But for these last words it was on the tip of the judicious doctor's tongue to pooh-pooh similarity and to magnify the slight points of difference, though obviously they were occasioned by the relative ages of the two Roberts. When, however, he was requested to speak out he delivered himself oracularly and categorically.

"A remarkable identity of structure in the limbs, especially in the tendency of a goitre throat in each."

"There!" ejaculated Martha Hodge, "'tis as if an angel had come from Heaven to bear witness!"

"A resemblance, too, of the facial muscles, but not of the shape of the eyes. Let me see—how shall I describe the difference? Sir Robert's eye is convex, slightly, indicating a talent for language. This young man's is not the reverse—that would be unnatural. It is, however, almost level. Ha! I have it. Your ladyship's eye is precisely similar in structure to his."

"Again! again!" laughed Martha. "'Tis an angel's voice, indeed!"

Lady Marmyon tried to smile, but bit her lip and flushed to the very roots of her hair, for Mr. Orphrey was regarding her with an expression of critical curiosity very trying indeed.

"The cerebellum and nape of the neck, the pose of the shoulder in front and behind, the shape of the nails and finger-joints, the lobe

of the ear, and the tone of voice, all are parallel. The similarity of profile too, is obvious enough."

"Thanks," laughed in an artificial way the diplomatic baronet. "We were discussing the striking resemblance between this young man and myself when you came in, and you have assured us of its reality. The Kentish breed, I suppose—the same in lord and laborer, eh? And now, doctor, not to detain you, will you go upstairs and see your patient?"

A little surprised at being suffered to go up alone, the doctor left, with Mrs. Pratling only for a cicerone. In vain Lady Marmyon whispered aloud to her husband, "Robert, won't you accompany Dr. Shadfort?" her suggestion met with no response, for the baronet had something in his throat which he felt must be said.

The doctor, however, had but just quitted the apartment, and Sir Robert had motioned to all to remain, for Robert Hodge was evidently anxious to escape, when the door opened stealthily, and there sneaked into the room with a guilty, nervous face, Errol Marmyon.

His father did not condescend to look at him, neither did he take any notice of his salutation; in fact, the very fact of his intrusion in the face of the parental prohibition caused his sire to utter far more forcibly than he would otherwise.

"My friends," said Sir Robert, "I am not one of those who measure all things human and divine by their own predilections. For many years I have sat on our local judicial bench, and it would ill become one who has been a judge to exhibit blind partiality or to ignore the weight of evidence. As my son Errol is in the room it is perhaps as well that he should understand that it has been asserted that Robert there, hitherto known to us as Robert Hodge, is in reality his elder brother."

"What!" gasped Errol.

"Don't interrupt, if you please. Be content to hear. At first I did not think that the evidence adduced in favor of this extraordinary proposition was worthy either of credence or of consideration, but my opinion, though it has altered but little in regard of the former, has altered materially in favor of the latter. We have heard enough to-night to justify us in forming an opinion that the story of Martha Hodge may be true. I can only assure you, therefore, Robert, that as a man of integrity, who desires to do unto others as he would be done by, I shall not leave this matter uninvestigated, and, in the *interim*, shall hold my judgment in suspense. But of this rest assured—if your case should be proved to my belief, so that I am convinced of its truth, you will have no cause to complain of me. I have been and ever shall be, while I breathe, a father to my sons, and if—owing to an accident which is not his fault—I have in this world a son who has not been trained and educated as my son should be, I shall not turn my back upon him. I will battle for his rights, and extend to him the aid and protection of a parent. I am, my friend, and I own it, a proud man, but my pride is not petty, and my sense of obligation shall never be blunted by prejudice, still less by vulgarity. On the other hand, if I should learn that an attempt had been made, on no other basis than men-

dacity, to wrong me and my house, I am still able to protect myself and those who belong to me."

"Robert," murmured Lady Marmyon, in a low tone, "you are very quixotic and very unguarded. You should speak for me as well as yourself. I am interested, surely."

"And I," hissed Errol, between his teeth.

"If I may venture to intrude an observation," ventured Mr. Orphrey, "it is that happily for all parties we are not the judge and not the jury in this case. Sir Robert only maintains his character for equity when he promises not to prejudge its merits, and I have no doubt that whatever action is taken by him or by Lady Marmyon will be based on the lines of strict fairness—that is of Christianity."

"Oh, yes," sighed Lady Marmyon, "we shall always, I trust, act justly, at whatever sacrifice of personal feeling."

"You hear that," observed the baronet, advancing to Robert, and placing his hand on the young man's shoulder. "Your cause is safe in our hands."

"But not in mine," almost sobbed Errol, breaking passionately from his mother's side and striding up to the middle of the large room where were standing his father and Robert. "But not in mine. I'll combat your claim from court to court. I'll fight you up to the House of Lords, and there's no fear that they will decide in *your* favor."

"Their judgments are unimpeachable," answered Sir Robert, indignantly. To question the wisdom of the Upper House was in his eyes the quintessence of communism.

"Except in ecclesiastical causes," smiled Mr. Orphrey.

Robert, slightly bewildered, looked on Errol, and was startled to see that young gentleman's dark face positively livid with fury It was indeed passing strange that to one man the honor and glory of Marmyon meant so little, to the other so much. And the oddity of it all was, that the covetous man though not rich was not poor, while the other had not a sovereign in his possession.

"I wouldn't if I were you bark before I was bitten, Mr. Errol," he remarked. "If you only knew how little I care to be a fish out of water, to be the ass in the lion's skin, you wouldn't fret. A few acres of land and a cow in the States will satisfy me. But thank you, Sir Robert, all the same. You've given me a better opinion of you and your order than I had before. If I may say so without offense, you seem to be as honorable as one of us—one of the men who only eat what they earn."

"Good-night!" was Sir Robert's rejoinder. The ring of the Republican metal in those last words rather jarred on his ear. Besides, it accentuated the difference between Robert the baronet and Robert the laborer rather uncomfortably, and forced him to own to himself that my lady's worldly wisdom was a frailty in which he was deficient, rather regrettably.

And so they began slowly to troop out of the library, when suddenly Dr. Shadfort reappeared and instinctively they all paused to hear his verdict.

"The patient," he said, with deliberation, but cheerily, "has passed through the crisis. He will recover—with due care and attention. In fact I need not see him to-morrow unless a change

for the worse takes place, and that I regard as virtually impossible."

"What's that?" gasped Martha Hodge.

"The patient, my good woman, is out of danger. He will be convalescent in a fortnight."

"Lawk!" groaned Martha, "and for me to have let the cat out of the bag. Well, I never! If I ain't made a mess of it!"

* * * * * * *

That night Plantagenet sat up in bed and asked for his father.

Nurse Pratling replied vaguely that Sir Robert had a goodish bit to worry him, and was with my lady in the drawing-room a-talkin' it over, though it was midnight.

"But," said the young man, "he will come to me if you ask him. He will come gladly. My father loves me."

"I'll ask him," replied the nurse, in a tone of dubiety.

And she did ask him, and was told to say that Sir Robert was unable to come upstairs then, as he had something very particular to discuss with Lady Marmyon.

"Perhaps," murmured the sick man, "it was all a dream; but it was a sweet dream. Since I was a child I don't seem to have had any one to love me. My mother made a favorite of Errol. My father dragooned me, but was seldom kind. I dreamed, however, that Sir Robert came to my bedside and spoke such loving words as made my heart thrill. But I suppose it was all an illusion. I will try to sleep and dream again."

And so the wearied man turned his face to the wall with all the bitter feeling of being indeed an alien in his own house.

In the meanwhile the baronet and his *cara spera* were indulging in a wrangle, almost with the buttons off their foils.

"I never could acknowledge that creature as my son," pouted my lady. "Plantagenet is bad enough, but we have taught him to respect the aspirate, and to assume the bearing of a gentleman. He is wofully inferior to Errol, still—"

"I can not admit that," rejoined the baronet. "Plantagenet is manly, honest, simple. Of course, he is ingrainedly boorish, and—to be candid—he is himself an argument in favor of Mrs. Hodge's story. Fancy, Plantagenet Hodge! What a bathos!"

"It's nonsense to talk about anything so silly," protested Lady Marmyon. "If you had a grain of common-sense or good-feeling you would nip it in the bud."

"I have a respect for right," replied Sir Robert, severely. "If this man, Robert Hodge, is really our first-born, what right have we to rob him of his inheritance in order to secure it for the child of John and Martha Hodge?"

"There are too many 'ifs' about it," remarked her ladyship, meditatively. "Granted that all along I've had such a rooted antipathy to Plantagenet that it hardly surprises me to be told he is none of mine, still, how can I, how can you, regard in the light of our eldest son a fellow taken from the plow-tail and the public-house? Have you no sense of satire? The notion is really ridiculous, and we should be the laughing-stock of the county if saddled with such a monster of vulgarity. No. Trust to a woman's wit. I see the way through the thicket. You must bring pressure

on Planny to join you in breaking the entail of the estate. Then you must resettle it on Errol, who is not our hypothetical son, but indisputably a Marmyon *pur sang*."

Sir Robert took up the poker and hammered away at a huge lump of coal. Then he remarked, rather peevishly, "Your plan would not answer. You can not break an entail without adequate consideration, besides which Robert Hodge could apply to the Court of Chancery against any such arrangement, and readily establish his claim both to the title and to the estate under the entail. As for Errol, I am by no means proud of him. Say what you will, he has shown in this business a black heart."

"You are very harsh and censorious," pleaded Lady Marmyon. "Errol was tempted by jealousy to fall in with Dr. Lembic's scheme; but it is that man with his revolting and cruel disposition, who is the demon, not our poor boy. Why, what brought him here to brave your wrath?"

"I don't know," yawned the baronet, as one who would rather not listen.

"Simply this. He was afraid that this medicine—this antidote, as I believe it to be—had not arrived, as you did not reply to Dr. Lembic's wire, and so he journeyed with it all the way from Oxford. If that was not good-hearted I am deceived indeed."

"It may have been dread of the gallows. It may have been repentance," observed Sir Robert. "I wish I could think it was the latter. I wish I could change my opinion about Errol."

"Well," continued her ladyship, "anyhow the medicine has done its work. You heard what Dr. Shadfort said—the man's life is safe."

"Yes," mused her husband, "it is so—and for Errol's sake let us be thankful, for I'm certain Martha Hodge would have hanged him, or tried to do so, if the case had been fatal. Beyond a doubt, whether she is under a delusion or not, the woman is madly, passionately fond of Planny."

"And yet she has had to stifle any expression of that feeling till to-day?"

"Quite so. But in the interest of Planny! She hoped to live to see him perched on his pinnacle, and perhaps, after I was gone and he had come unjustly into his kingdom she would have told her tale and earned the reward of her iniquity. Who knows?"

"She is either a knave or a lunatic," muttered my lady.

"A knave!" answered Sir Robert, "and one who gained her end by the easy process of keeping her mouth shut. Had she told her secret to her husband, John, it would have oozed out. Widow Gipps seems to have suspected it from the first, but Martha Hodge never uttered a syllable in the way of hint to justify that suspicion till the moment arrived, and my humble conviction is that, so little does she care for her reputed son Robert, she would never have broken her seal—even if Planny had succumbed—but for the accident which revealed to her Errol's villainy. If her tale be true she has, in attacking Errol, ruined the chances of her own son. However, as things are, the battle will have to be fought between who is in possession, and Robert, the claimant. Our *rôle* clearly is neutrality."

"I am not so clear about that," said Lady Marmyon. "What we do need at once is legal advice of the highest character, and that should be obtained without delay."

"Ah!" ejaculated Sir Robert, bitterly. "The sword of Solomon could not decide between these two, and both are equally a bad bargain."

"Then," urged Lady Marmyon, "shunt them both. Send Hodge to America—he wants to go—then give Planny the choice either of breaking the entail and taking his portion now, once and forever, or of standing the fire of Hodge with you at that claimant's back. Planny will cave in. He would keep the reversion of the title, for of course Hodge would be bound under a penalty not to claim it; but that's the least part of the evil, and may be dismissed. To proceed with the programme—you would then settle all that was left on Errol, who would go into Parliament, and might, if he played his cards well, secure in the long-run a peerage, or at all events another baronetcy."

Sir Robert pondered a long minute. Then he said, firmly, "Your programme possesses the strong merit of worldly wisdom, but it is in essence unjust. You award the supposititious child a title, and a round sum; you cut the real heir adrift, and send him off to the ends of the earth. Is that Christian?"

"Christianity," rejoined my lady, "consists in keeping up appearances. For instance, it is not essential to Christianity that one should sacrifice one's good name—for an abstract idea."

"One's talents, I admit," said Sir Robert, "are given one to be er—ah—utilized, and of course among one's talents must be reckoned as most precious an ancient name and an unblemished escutcheon. You are correct there."

"Yes, dear," pleaded the artful lady, coaxingly. "I felt sure that when you once came to view this painful dilemma all round you would be guided to a just conclusion. Here we are with a son said to be ours whom it is impossible to acknowledge without disgrace, and with a son said to be not ours for whom we entertain not even the semblance of affection."

"There I—er—ah differ. I have lately got to be attached to Planny."

Lady Marmyon opened her eyes. "Very lately," she rejoined, with a sarcastic smile. "Faugh! that is all sentimentality. We have nothing to do really with either of these young men. But with Errol the case is altogether different. He is ours by birth, by association. He is ours physically, mentally, socially. We had better for the future consider that we have only one son."

Sir Robert sighed.

"I suppose it must be so," he said, "but I would that it were in my power to make the vile woman Hodge smart for her sin."

"Never mind her. You agree to my programme?"

The baronet did acquiesce in it—reluctantly. Nevertheless the thought flashed across his brain that *la femme propese, mais ne dispose pas.*

CHAPTER XV.

PERKIN WARBECK'S DISILLUSIONMENT.

A FORTNIGHT, as Dr. Shadfort predicted, sufficed to bring Plantagenet Marmyon within distance of convalescence. During that period he was kept in absolute ignorance of the sword of Damocles that was superimpending his devoted head. To avoid the extreme awkwardness of the situation, too, Sir Robert and his wife, having put off the visit of Mrs. Frankalmoign and Ida on the plea of having a sick house, departed for Christmas to Bournemouth, Errol, at her ladyship's earnest request, accompanying them. Plantagenet, relegated to the society of Nurse Pratling, thought it unfeeling that his parents should have thus deserted him, nor did he fail to take a mental note of the fact that Errol was restored to favor. Still he was not a man much addicted to fretting, or to manufacturing mental mole-hills into mountains, so he stuck to his business of getting well. His face already had begun to heal, though the marks were such as he would bear to his dying day. His arm, of course, was still in a sling, and he was very weak; but his appetite was already returning, and he was able to get about the house and amuse himself during the long hours of solitude with novels and society papers.

The first hint he heard of there being a mystery in the background was given him by the behavior of the servants. There was noteworthy in their conduct to him a certain unwillingness in lieu of their normal alacrity. He might ring the bell half a dozen times and it would not be answered. Nobody seemed to care to wait on him, and but for Nurse Pratling, whose attentions were unremitting he might have been occasionally dinnerless. Dr. Shadfort's visits had been summarily stopped, Sir Robert having, as he said, no mind to pay fees of thirty guineas for the sake of anonymuncules, nor were they supplemented by those of the local doctor. He was, in short, left to get well as best he might, and perhaps that was not a little in his favor.

One morning he had been reading a novel of Miss Braddon for an hour or more, and being engrossed let the fire in the library sink to the level of a few embers. It was cold enough, being Yuletide, and he rang the bell to have the fire relighted. No response. Then he rang again. Still no answer. Yet again. The same result. Angered at this treatment he shouted aloud for William, and at last that superb personage lolled in.

"What's the meaning of this, William?"

William turned down the corners of his mouth and replied, haughtily, "Meanin'! What's the meanin' of givin' yourself such blessed hairs, Plantagernet? Don't you go to give me none of your bloomin' cheek, young man. Want coals, do ye? Then fetch 'em yourself. I sha'n't."

Plantagenet started to his legs, and the blood rushed to his pale forehead. This was the style of thing to which he was utterly unaccustomed.

"You'll leave the house at once for your impudence, fellow."

"Feller! Oh, you calls me feller, does yer, Plantagenet What's-yer-name? A quid to a tizzy you leaves afore I do."

"What! Are you mad?"

"'Orf my chump? No, not me. I'm the servant of Sir Robert Marmyon, and wery proud I am to serve so good a master, and my lady too, and any one as bears the name of Marmyon."

"Then why this gross insolence?"

"You'd better ask Mr. Hodge, of the Marmyon Arms, Mr. Plantagernet What's-yer-name." And with a loud burst of scornful laughter William disappeared, slamming the door behind him.

If Plantagenet had not been crippled and weak William would have thought twice before thus insulting a giant, whose prowess was in truth magnificent. He was, however, on safe ground, for a convalescent after typhoid possesses the potentiality of a baby.

Plantagenet, therefore, sat down in the chilly chamber, took up Miss Braddon and tried to read. But it was no use. He shivered, being bloodless, and the utterance of the flunky William kept echoing and re-echoing in his ears. At last in despair he laid the volume down, and walked upstairs to Nurse Pratling, who was seated in a very cozy snuggery, with a bright beechen log on her fire, banked up by hop-poles.

"Well, nurse," began the invalid rather drearily, "you see I have come to beg a warm at your fire. The atmosphere in the library is icy."

"More foolisher of you, sir, not to keep a warm room. Fancy now if you was to get a chill! A relapse it would be and no mistake."

"It doesn't seem to signify much to the people of this house," he remarked with acerbity, "whether I live or die."

"Ah," rejoined the nurse, "that's low spirits, that's what it is, Mr. Plantagenet. But you'll soon be yourself again."

He did not notice her, but sitting down began to warm his hands and feet, his features wearing the expression of what is termed a brown-study.

At last, after a very long pause, he asked, in a low tone, "Is it, or is it not, the case that Sir Robert came and sat by my bedside and said that he loved me, and that if I died it would break his heart?"

"He said all that, sir, and a deal more in my very hearing."

"You are quite sure, nurse?"

"As sure as that the nose is on my face. Why should I go to deceive you?"

Just so. But then—after that it seems strange that both my father and mother should have left when my life was supposed to be hanging in the balance, and without a syllable of farewell! There's not much sign of heart-breaking or common parental affection in that."

Nurse fidgeted, and remarked evasively, and apropos of nothing in particular, that "she didn't know."

"But, nurse, you surely must be able to assign some reason for this extraordinary and barbarous conduct. The very servants seem to comprehend that my father treats his eldest son with cool indifference. At all events that is the conclusion I am driven to by the impudent conduct of that scoundrel, William."

Again nurse fidgeted, and again she framed an idiotic and evasive reply to the effect that to account for her betters' doings was "not her place," though as regards the contumacious William she did not hesitate to affirm categorically that he deserved a horsewhipping.

Plantagenet, never very brilliant of intellect, felt completely fogged. To resist the presentiment of evil was impossible, for it seemed to haunt him, and dog his footsteps at every turn. Moreover, the mischief, whatever it was, being enveloped in mystery, tried his patience all the more severely. No marvel, therefore, that in a fit of almost puerile petulance he exclaimed, "I'd give fifty pounds to know what it all means."

"Better keep your fifty pounds in your purse," observed nurse sententiously; "not so many of 'em in this world as what they're sure to be missed sooner or later."

"Faugh!" said he, contemptuously, "fifty pounds one way or the other makes little difference."

"To some it do, to others it don't!" aphorized Nurse Pratling. The words, reiterating the advice to be careful, sounded peculiar to the invalid. They were friendly and they were also suggestive. What could it mean? Here was a man, heir under strict entail to an estate which in prosperous times had exceeded in value twenty thousand a year, and now averaged above fifteen thousand, recommended seriously to be careful about a paltry fifty pounds. What could have happened?

"I am perfectly certain, nurse, that there is something in the wind, though of its nature I am in ignorance. If you are wiser than I am I will make it worth your while to treat me as a confidant."

But nurse was silent.

"Tell me," said he, "am I to account for William's insolence by this mystery, or whatever it may be?"

"You can do as you like, sir. All I can say is that when Sir Robert comes to hear of his man-servant's behavior it will be hot for William."

"Yes, yes; I can answer for that. Sir Robert would never permit a son of his to be insulted by a servant. Faugh! Absurd!"

"Nor yet," added Mrs. Pratling, "allow William to give hisself airs to anybody as was living under his roof."

"Airs!" echoed the young gentleman. "Airs indeed! Why, he called me Plantagenet What's-your-name, and when I demanded what he meant, said I'd better go and inquire of old Mother Hodge, the woman that keeps the public-house in the village."

"Oh!" remarked Mrs. Pratling, with a very serious and annoyed look. "He mentioned the name of Mrs. Hodge, did he? Just like his vulgar, low-bred imperence. Servants of his sort, sir! There, I don't call 'em servants; I calls 'em Judasses, I does."

Plantagenet's slow brain all of a sudden seemed to get a touch of the truth.

"So," suggested he, "William ought not to have quoted Mother Hodge to me. Is that so?"

"Perhaps he did ought, or, mayhap, he didn't ought. But, if you'll excuse me, sir, you're asking over many questions."

"I'll ask no more," he replied, and rising, walked down-stairs,

put on a thick coat and wrapper, seized a stout stick, and walked out of his old home, as events proved, on a long journey.

Had Nurse Pratling been aware of his intention she would have prevented him, for he ought not to have risked the icy temperature of December so soon after leaving his bed of peril. As it was, she rather rejoiced at having got rid of her importunate cross-questioner, and composed herself to needle-work quite luxuriously.

Plantagenet staggered rather than walked down the avenue, out into the high-road, so into the village, and then across the green to the Marmyon Arms. The bar was full of bibbers; he therefore walked quietly round to the private entrance, and rapped imperiously for admittance.

The door was opened by Robert Hodge, who stared as at an apparition, flushed up to the eyes, and in a tone of quiet independence asked, "What can I do for you, sir?"

"Let me in before I get my death," returned Plantagenet, in a sepulchral tone. "Is your mother at home? I wish to see her—on a matter of some importance, perhaps."

Robert stood aside, passed the big invalid with the broken arm into the back parlor, gave him a seat, and then summoned his mother from the recesses of the bar, where she was serving fools with poison they could none of them afford to pay for without robbing their children's stomachs.

"Mrs. Hodge, sit down, will you? And you, Robert, need not leave the room: I have come here to-day at considerable risk to ask you a plain question or two. May I beg you, in return, to give me a straightforward answer? You have reminded me more than once of the debt I owe you for having nursed me in babyhood. If the tie then created should make you regard me with friendly feelings, I am confident you will be candid with me."

And he paused in the middle of his exordium, being startled to see a tear in Martha Hodge's eye and a tendency in her lips to twitch.

"G—go on!" she stammered as though trying to suppress a sob. "G—go on. I know what's a-coming, and what a fool I made of myself."

"Fool is hardly the word," sneered Robert, glancing over his shoulder.

"Well," snapped she, "don't you grumble. Suppose I had held my blessed tongue, what then?"

"I don't know, neither can I guess to what you allude," said Plantagenet, imperiously; "but enough. I will come to the point at once—without further preface."

Yet somehow he looked rather at a loss how to achieve this feat, for he passed his hand over his forehead as though to collect his thoughts. Then he proceeded leisurely, indeed hesitatingly:

"Our man, William, who hitherto has never been wanting in respect, thought fit this morning to be grossly insolent. Among other insolences he was pleased to style me as Mr. Plantagenet What's-your-name. And when I demanded the reason of this very objectionable conduct, all I could get out of the rascal was 'You go and ask Mrs. Hodge.' So here I am."

But Mrs. Hodge was whimpering and carrying on idiotically, like a woman guilty of some heinous offense, and in fact so overcome

was the good woman with hysterical sobbing that she could not speak, or indeed utter aught except incomprehensible gulps and miserable moans.

"This is all very inexplicable!" cried Plantagenet, turning impatiently to Robert. "Perhaps you, my good fellow, can explain. Hey?"

"Certainly I can. But perhaps you'd rather not hear. Perhaps you'd better defer the explanation till you're in health again."

There was a proud ring in this of an adversary. Possibly Robert may have recollected his visit to Maidstone jail.

"I am well enough, thank you, to hear any news, however bad, and brave enough, I trust, to bear it."

Robert meditated, until Mrs. Hodge gurgled forth, "You speak for me, Robert, I can't say it."

Then he sat down opposite to Plantagenet—he had been standing deferentially—and in a low tone commenced with, "What you ask me to reveal, sir, must be painful for you to hear, and it's no pleasure for me to tell, for this reason, that I am a man who didn't need a taste of skilly and oakum picking to be taught his proper place in the world. However, that's beside the mark. What Mrs. Hodge here wants me to confess to you refers to yourself in the first instance. Once again, can you bear it?"

He might well say this, for Plantagenet's lips were pallid, and his expression was that of one preparing to receive a blow, and gathering together on that account his nervous energy.

"Yes—man—yes. Go on."

"How shall I put it, sir? Perhaps the simplest words are the fittingest. I will put it, therefore, in this way, that you are not what you have been supposed to be, neither am I. My real name is Marmyon; your real name is Hodge."

Plantagenet, weak as he was, sprung to his legs as though he had been shot, staggered toward the window, and turned his back upon the pair. He could not or would not speak.

"And I'm sure," howled Mrs. Hodge, "I'd never have betrayed you—you as is my own flesh and blood, you as I'd hoped would be the king of this village—but for reasons as you shall hear all in good time, and when you hears 'em, you'll forgive the mother that bore you for this grievous wrong."

"The word "wrong" seemed to arrest Plantagenet's attention, for he suddenly faced Robert, and in a tone of urgency demanded, "Is it true?"

"I didn't invent it. I don' care a rush whether it's true or t'other thing. You don't suppose I want to be a baronet!"

"That is no answer to me. I repeat, is this true?"

"On the evidence of Mrs. Hodge there, who says that she changed us at birth, of Widow Gipps, Hester Mazebrook, and Nurse Pratling, it is true."

"Nurse Pratling?"

"Yes."

"And does Sir Robert, does Lady Marmyon accept this story?"

"That," replied Robert, "it is not for me to guess. It is rumored that they left the Court because—because—"

"Well—why?"

"Because it was awkward you lying ill and all. But that's mere hearsay. I know nothing except that I've no desire to stand in your light. Years ago, if that woman had not played me false, I might have been their son. It is too late now. We are at the opposite ends of the pole."

Again a dead silence, Plantagenet shading his eyes with the one hand he had for use.

"If you'll hear me," at length interposed Martha Hodge, who had recovered from her hiccoughy sobbing fit—"if you'll hear me I'll tell you how it was."

Plantagenet gazed at her as in a dream, but he vouchsafed no reply, composing his features to attention, and looking like one who in the midst of whirling machinery or the noise of a macadamized thoroughfare is doing his best to listen.

At first he hardly seemed to grasp what she said. He had already comprehended the fact that he was alleged to be of plebeian instead of patrician origin, a pauper instead of a man of prospective wealth, and Martha's tale of how this was effected hardly seemed to interest him. When, however, he heard of Errol's heartless villainy, of the plot against his life, of its frustration owing to Robert—the very man whom he unintentionally had supplanted, and whom he had actually clapped in jail—his intelligence arose to the occasion, and he grasped the entire situation clearly.

Turning to his mother, he said, "Woman, up at the Court there they have taught me to respect honor above all things. I can not thank you, therefore, for having made me the unwitting accomplice in a base fraud; neither do I blame you for confessing it—on the contrary, terrible as the descent in the social scale is to me, I am glad to feel that I am no swindler. In justice to Robert here, as well as to myself, I shall insist on his title being proved beyond contravention. But after what I have heard, after what you have alleged, I am compelled to assume the absolute truth of your story, and regard myself as your son."

"Which, sir"—she could not escape the habit of calling him "sir"—"you'd do very wrong, and you'd only play the game of your enemy, that wicked man, Errol Marmyon. Robert here, what do he say? He say he's not fit to be a baronet, and all that. He didn't want the title, or the money, or the position. He've set his heart upon marrying Polly Williams and going to America. What then's to hinder me from declaring as all I said the other night, when, as I thought, you lay a-dyin', was nothing better nor what folks calls a delusion? I'm willin' to swear to it on my gospel oath, or anything else, if so be I could keep you where you was till I made that wicked stupid of myself—though it were to cook Mr. Errol's goose for him."

Robert cast a side glance at Plantagenet to see how he would take this proposition. The answer was straight.

"No, Mrs. Hodge—mother, if mother you are. No tricks of that sort for me. If this man is heir, I will atone for the wrong I have done him by insisting on his rights. I will not only stand aside, I will be his advocate. If an Act of Parliament should be necessary—as I anticipate it will be—it shall be obtained on my petition. No, no. The way, and the only way, to checkmate Errol is through the

rightful heir under an entail that cannot be barred without that heir's consent. Do you understand me, Robert?"

"You speak honorably. You speak like one who would scorn a mean and dirty action. Yet till now I have looked upon you as an unprincipled bully. You've never interfered when you saw your fa—, that is to say Sir Robert, grinding the face of the poor. You never spoke a word to keep Widow Gipps out of the workhouse. I can't understand how it comes to pass that when you're put to the test, and it ain't a question of a florin in a week's wage, one way or t'other, to a man as sorely needs it, but of fifteen thousand a year, you come out as bright as steel."

"The error, my friend, is yours perhaps," answered Plantagenet. "I've always acted on the principle that everything, including labor, is worth what it will fetch and no more, but because I am so far a Tory you need not thereby count me a rogue. I may be wrong, and perhaps, now that I've got to look forward to earning my bread, I shall learn by bitter experience to modify my views."

"Earn your bread!" gasped Mrs. Hodge, in amazement.

"Yes. Why not? I have no ambition of starving"

"Sir Robert would never allow that."

"Excuse me, my good woman. What is Sir Robert Marmyon to me? You can't run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. This morning my name was Marmyon, and I had, as I supposed, the strongest claim on the man who was, by a singular fiction, styled my father. This evening I am Hodge. I've nothing in common with Sir Robert, and—as a matter of gratitude for the education and advantages he has given me hitherto—I shall not loaf about here and discredit or annoy him. But, so far from my having any claim on Sir Robert, he might demand equitably a large recompense for the heavy sums he has expended on me."

"Oh," protested Martha Hodge, "that's nonsense. Sir Robert will do the handsome thing, and if he won't Robert here—for my sake—ought to. So you did ought, Robert."

"You utterly misconstrue me, my good woman. I could not accept favors of the sort you indicate from Robert. You will pardon my saying so to your face, I am sure."

"Why then," whimpered Martha Hodge, "my son's a beggar."

"Precisely."

"But I heerd as you was to marry a rich young lady."

Plantagenet's countenance gloomed over, and his voice trembled as he said, in a strange undertone, "Yes—was to; but that is all over now. Rich young ladies in this world do not marry Perkin Warbecks. If I marry at all, I shall select some girl of the Polly Williams sort, who won't be ashamed of the awful name of Hodge, and I shall take her to Manitoba. Perhaps, Robert, I could do as well at farming virgin soil as you could. I've the muscles of the Hodge breed, and their pluck, too."

"I hope," replied Robert, respectfully, "you'll do better than that, sir. Anyhow, please remember that the law has first to decide between us. Till then, had you not better consider yourself to be Sir Robert's son?"

"A thousand times, no! I am Hodge, Hodge, for evermore Hodge. Mother, you must welcome your son home for the first

time since the day after his birth. Robert, oblige me by going to the Court and fetching my body-linen. Thank Mrs. Pratling for her kind attention, and tell them all, including Hester, that they've seen the last of Master Planny. Give my message as I give it to you."

Mrs. Hodge essayed remonstrance, but ineffectually. Her son's determination was adamantine and immovable, and when she tried him with tears he sternly told her that his stay in her house would be for a day or two only, until he recovered his strength.

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO MOVES ON THE BOARD.

THE next morning the whole country-side was ringing with the intelligence that Plantagenet Marmyon had quitted, what was styled Hibernically, his ancestral home and had taken up his quarters at the Marmyon Arms; and of course the invalid, whose recovery was not accelerated by news that could but cause him keen distress, more especially because he felt that Ida Frankalmoign was irretrievably parted from him, had to submit to some annoyance. First, Mr. Orphrey called and entreated him to return to the Court until the legality of Robert's claim could be decided. On the same errand followed Farmer Rodd and half a dozen other leading tenants, and not a few laborers, including—paradoxically—a poacher by whom he had dealt leniently when seated on the magisterial bench. To all he gave the same answer, "Thank you for your sympathy, but I've taken the course I mean to abide by."

As soon as he had disposed of these visitors he sat down and wrote a budget of letters to his friends, including one to Ida Frankalmoign, releasing her from the shadowy tie that bound her, and ending with a heartfelt prayer that she might unite her lot with one worthy of her. Lastly, he wrote to Sir Robert, and as this is a letter of some importance it shall be given *in extenso*:

"DEAR SIR," he wrote, "I have been made acquainted with certain data relative to my birth and parentage which led me to believe that you have been imposed upon, and I have been, without my knowledge or consent, placed in the position of impostor. In one word, that we are strangers, and that the tie which has hitherto bound us is spurious. To you I am indebted for the possession of that principle of honor which at once induces me to abandon a name to which I never had any right, and a place under your roof which I have usurped. I need not express my regret for the past, keenly as I feel it, because I am not to blame. Rather I will offer you my deep thanks for the care you have evinced for my welfare. I consider that I shall be rendering the largest amends in my power by forthwith surrendering all claim to be your son or your heir, and by volunteering my cordial co-operation in securing his birthright to the man whom I have supplanted. I need not, I hope, add that I shall hasten to retire with as little delay as may be from a position to me

so cruelly equivocal. As soon as I learned the truth I promptly quitted Marmyon Court, where I could but regard myself as an intruder and an interloper, and where already I had become an object of derision and contempt to the servants. In fact I have, without loss of a moment, endeavored to enact the part of a humble but chivalrous unit—I cannot write myself gentleman, being nothing of the kind. I have requested the Lord Lieutenant to ask the Lord Chancellor to remove my name from the list of magistrates. I have resigned my membership of the Carlton and Turf Clubs. I have conscientiously striven to efface myself and my bogus pretensions, and have publicly made reparation to the utmost of my power. Anything further that you may suggest as desirable to be done by me I shall be ready to acquiesce in, and with my duty to Lady Marmyon, I beg to subscribe myself,

"Yours respectfully,

"PLANTAGENET HODGE.

"To Sir Robert Marmyon, Bart."

We will follow this letter to its destination at Bournemouth. It arrived at breakfast-time, and was read to his wife and son by Sir Robert—to render him justice—not without emotion.

"There!" he exclaimed, "Planny is not my son but my pupil, and I will say this much of him—er—ah, that if it had been myself—er—ah, that is to say, if I had been unexpectedly placed in his shoes, I could not have met an embarrassing situation more chivalrously, more in the spirit of a true gentleman."

Errol shrugged his shoulders. "What earthly good could the man do," he demanded, "by going on the other tack? I really fail to perceive the supreme merit of throwing up the sponge when you are beaten."

"And I," interposed Lady Marmyon, rather scornfully, "cannot help feeling surprise that two members of the superior sex should read that person's letter and utterly lose the point."

Errol laughed.

"The point," he remarked, "of that individual's drivel resembles Euclid's point. It has no magnitude."

"The point," said Sir Robert, "seems to me this—that whether he's Marmyon or Hodge, Planny's a downright good fellow."

"Yes," sneered Lady Marmyon, "very good. Quite too good, my dear Robert! Why, what can you both be thinking about? Don't you see through all that affectation of chivalry. The idea of a Hodge boasting the quality that appertains only to the *sang azul!* Don't you see that the fellow retires so abruptly, so ridiculously, in order to play the game of a far more dangerous enemy of ours—the actual claimant? Depend upon it, these two have put their heads together. They have joined forces against us; and, probably, if the truth could be got at, we should discover that the one rogue abandons his claim on consideration of the other rogue going shares. Don't you remember the story of the card-sharpers? How a very innocent swindler went to sleep on a sofa in the room where another of his kidney was cheating a gentleman by means of loaded dice; and how he remained asleep till the gentleman left with empty pockets, and then opened both his eyes—he had had one closed before—and fired off

one word only, 'Halves!' Depend upon it, the low animal I used to foolishly try to persuade my skeptical conscience was my son has cleverly outgeneraled us. He has, while we supposed him too ill to stir outside the house, cleverly demanded 'halves' of that clod-hopping creature, Mr. Robert Marmyon, and he's secured it."

"You do them both injustice," observed Sir Robert. "But I agree with you so far—Planny traverses our programme by yielding so precipitately, and he exhibits an antagonistic aim to ours when he proposes to support actively the claimant."

"That's awkward," suggested Errol; "still he's done nothing. This chap, Robert Hodge—I prefer to call him Hodge—could easily be got out of the way, I should think, and then you'd have Mr. Plantagenet on the hip. If he'd fall in with your views and break the entail, he'd have an income; if not—"

"Hold!" cried Sir Robert. "A happy, happy thought, worthy of Mr. Burnand himself. Suppose we get them both to join in breaking the entail? Hey, Lady Marmyon?"

"And suppose," replied the lady, "they both refuse? And suppose, if they want ready money, they go to the Jews, and on their joint bond get what they want? What would then become of Errol?"

"You've got the brain of a Lord Chancellor, mother," said the young man; adding, "It's not a bright outlook for me."

Sir Robert pressed his hand to his forehead; then he drank a cup of tea; then he turned round to his son, and delivered himself with the oracular certainty of one both fertile in resources and also in the habit of sitting in judgment.

"You, boy, and your mother both dislike Planny and distrust him. I do neither. But the more I ponder over the problem, the more clearly does it appear to me that he is not to be bribed or cajoled or tricked. Here, as elsewhere, honesty is the best policy. Planny, take my word for it, is not in league with Robert, neither is Robert with Planny. Planny's bright sense of honor, for which I respect him heartily, impels him to seek to render full justice to the man whom he has defrauded. He will carry that programme through successfully, with us or without us, with our acquiescence or in the teeth of our disapprobation. Read his letter again and you will agree with me that his determination is unalterable. Besides, he has burned his bridges: he has gone out of the Carlton; he has practically ceased to be a magistrate; he has left the Court; he has abdicated his position. It would be morally impossible for him to eat his words, to undo his acts, to resume his place at my table, to be his old self again. Neither is he the man to play at mendacity. He is by far too magnanimous. Robert, the claimant, is a man of quite a different kidney. He is, of course, our own flesh and blood, but his training has been most disastrous. The fellow's endowed by nature with splendid brains, and Orphrey says he's something of a genius. But he's been a public-house singer, a democratic spouter, and little short of a vagabond. It happens, however, that his republicanism rather dovetails with our interests the interests of Errol. He wants to go to America. He wants to transmogrify himself into a citizen of the Yankee Republic. Let him do so by all means, and if only he will agree to break the entail he may start as a Texan

farmer, or a Chicago bacon-curer, or a Californian miner with ample capital. What do you think, Lady Marmyon?"

"I'm inclined to agree with you," she said, at once, and with emphasis.

"And you, Errol?"

"I—I don't know. I should like to find out what these two fellows have been up to. Planny dates from the Marmyon Arms; Robert Hodge, of course, is there too. I'll wager something heavy these men are acting in concert."

"That may be so," replied Lady Marmyon, "and it would be wise policy to find out, if we can. In any case we must be opportunists and move step by step."

This sapient sentiment ended the domestic palaver. Appropriately, my lady enjoyed the feminine privilege of the last word. At luncheon, however, it was resumed by Sir Robert delivering himself of the reply he had penned to Plantagenet's letter. It was to this effect:

"DEAR PLANNY,—Your letter just received has affected us deeply. It reflects equal credit on your head and on your heart. Believe me, I should have felt it to be a sacred duty to break gently to you this distressing intelligence, and I am much displeased that it should have been communicated to your ear by any living human being but myself. You, I perceive, have taken for granted the truth of Mrs. Hodge's allegations. I was by no means prepared to decide even mentally without further investigation, and had you waited to consult me before moving definitely I should have advised a different and more cautious course. As it is, you have precipitated matters, and I think on our return it will be advisable to take the opinion of the gentlemen of the long robe. And now, Planny, putting aside legality and the question of blood-relationship, I trust you will ever consider yourself to be, if not my son in blood, at all events my adopted son. Do me the favor of again taking up your quarters at the Court as one of our household, for while I live you shall never feel the want of a father.

"Believe me, dear Planny,

"Yours ever affectionately,

"ROBERT MARMYON."

"Er—ah," continued the baronet, all in the same breath, "the difficulty is the address. Suppose I put in a postcript to ask him to retain the name of Marmyon?"

"Come, come!" cried Errol, "that is too much."

"And the letter," remarked her ladyship, "strikes me as so much behawder. It's all patronage, and I should, were I the man, recoil from it as offensive."

"Yes," retorted Sir Robert, "but then you never entertained any natural affection for poor Planny!"

At this sally both mother and son tittered, while the latter murmured beneath his breath, "Natural affection for a changeling! Absurd! Just like his sentimentality."

"What's that you say, Errol?"

"Oh! nothing, father. I don't agree with you, that's all."

"Then keep your remarks to yourself, boy. The letter expresses my meaning, and that is enough."

"It really doesn't signify," yawned my lady. "Mr. Plantagenet Hodge is not likely to infest Marmyon Court, thank goodness—there are two people to be consulted about that. And as regards the rest, if he doesn't appreciate your soft sawder—well, really, it's of no consequence."

And so the letter went, and we will follow it to its destination, as we traced that of the man to whom it was addressed.

Sir Robert, with a courtesy that did him honor, gave Plantagenet this old name, and the letter with the Marmyon crest on the envelope and the address, "Plantagenet Marmyon," created a sensation in the bar of the public-house, where sundry natives were discussing their early glass about the time when people are beginning to dream of tea or coffee.

It reached the young man's hands after careful inspection by Mrs. Hodge and Belinda. The former being a woman arrived at a matronly age, and withal claiming maternal relations with him, felt justified in carrying it up to his bedroom door. If her son, however, habit caused her to regard him rather as her master, so she knocked, and there being a grunt between the sheets entered subserviently enough.

"I've brought you a letter, my dear, from Sir Robert."

"Very well, put it down on the table and go. And look here, I object to being called 'my dear.' You will consider me, if you please, simply as an ordinary lodger in the house."

A tear rose to Martha's eye, but in silence she turned to leave.

"And hie, Mrs. Hodge! can't you get me something fit to eat for breakfast? No more reezy bacon, please. I should like a spatchcocked fowl and mushroom sauce."

"It can't be got, sir," responded Martha, humbly; shivering, however, at the humiliation of calling her own son "sir."

"Then something else—only something fit to eat. You understand—I pay for what I have. Let me be served properly."

"But," sobbed Martha, "I don't want 'ee to pay nothing, and you have the best as is. To think of my boy, as I have thought of and watched these years, coming home for the first time and speaking to his mother like that."

"I can't help it. You and I, woman, are the same, yet different. My ideas are not yours, nor yours mine. I shall clear out of this—that's certain. The Court was a false position; this is worse than false—absurd. Now, go!"

And she went, carrying a heavy heart away with her.

Lady Marmyon had rightly divined his temper. He read Sir Robert's rather humbugging epistle, and his practical comment on it was to order a fly to convey him to the station. He could not walk the mile, but for all that he resolved to bury himself and his sorrow and shame in the Metropolis. There he could be a stranger. He had only to avoid the haunts of men—that is, of the men with whom he had once associated—and he would be what he now craved earnestly to be, nobody—one who might be Smith, Brown, or Jones, a duplicate of all the Smiths, Browns, and Joneses he jostled in the street.

Another letter, however, had arrived at the Marmyon Arms by the same post, and this had quite escaped the curiosity of mother and daughter and the satyrs of the bar, for the simple reason that Robert had put it in his pocket, having received it direct from the postman's hands. This epistle did not betray such signs of aristocracy as a crest, neither was the envelope scented with Atkinson's or Rimmel's perfumes. It smelled, if of anything, rather of beer and tobacco. The handwriting on the envelope was not remarkable for elegance, and it was blurred and blotched. Yet this ugly thing seemed to fascinate its recipient, for he grinned and retired to the recesses of the stable to digest its contents, like a boy with a box of chocolates surreptitiously obtained. We will peep over his shoulder.

The letter was from our old friend, Mr. Hercules Flaymar, of the Central Democratic Leverage Union, and this was its purport, so far as we can decipher the handwriting:

"DEAR CITIZEN ROBERT MARMYON,—I am requested by the committee of the Union to express to you the satisfaction with which we have read in the columns of 'The Social Scavenger' the full and particular account of your having put in a claim to the estates of that blood-sucking varmint Sir Robert Marmyon. We feel that your cause is the cause of the people. Our union is not just now flush of funds, owing to Jehoshaphat Smiggs, our late treasurer, having absconded with the money that was credited to our account in the bank, but I am desired to assure you by the committee that if you require funds to prosecute your claim we are ready to find them almost to any extent, and also to provide you in the meantime with subsistence suitable to a citizen of position. We should not make an offer of this character if it wasn't that we feel implicit confidence in your honor. We know that if you win, the popular cause will be benefited, and so we are prepared, as your brothers in labor and sympathizers in suffering, to throw in our lot with you, and indeed and in truth, for the sake of your rights, to sacrifice all we possess,

"We are, dear citizen,

"Yours fraternally.

"Signed for the Committee,

"HERCULES FLAYMAR.

"P.S.—It's likely enough I may run down to-morrow morning, and bring with me a friend. So be in the way.

"H. F."

There passed over Robert Marmyon's face a glimmer of intense pride and self-satisfaction. For the first time in his life he had met with that most delicate form of adulation, an affectation of respect. True, ever since the astounding news had been bruited abroad, his former fellows had tried their best to toady, but the effort was too glaringly transparent, and they only got snubbed for their pains. But to be courted and sung about by the great orator, Hercules Flaymar, the captain of a legion of working-men, was quite another matter. It added an inch to Robert's stature.

He lolled and loafed about till Plantagenet came down to break-

fast, and then strolled toward the station to meet the 10.25 from Blackfriars. Perhaps the Republican Chrysostom might descend upon peaceful Marmyon by that very rapid and convenient train.

His conjecture was correct. Hercules had come, and with him a friend. Moreover, the said friend was introduced as Mr. Ferretman, who described himself as being the salaried solicitor of the Central Democratic Leverage Union.

This looked like business, but Robert's eyes were so blinded by the jaunty subservience of Mr. Hercules Flaymar, and the studied deference of the lawyer, that he did not at all see it in that light. To him it represented fraternity—nothing more.

They walked leisurely to the Marmyon Arms. But here an awkwardness occurred *in limine*. The only private room in the house was the bar-parlor, and therein sat, lazily, Plantagenet, finishing his breakfast in lordly style.

Hercules gazed across the counter and recognized his man, remarking to Robert, "What! he's on the premises, is he?"

"He's going shortly—going to town," explained Robert, nervously.

"So am I; so's Mr. Ferretman. But we want a quiet talk with you first, my boy. Can't you turn the feller out? What business has he—confound him! to block your parlor?"

Robert flushed a little. Perhaps he thought so too. Anyhow, he was put on his mettle, but hardly knew how to act. To his surprise, however, Hercules Flaymar whispered to the lawyer, and the lawyer having returned the whisper, without "with your leave" pushed past Belinda—Martha Hodge was in the kitchen washing up—and stalked coolly in the parlor, facing Pantagenet defiantly.

"What do you want here?" demanded the latter, imperiously.

"I don't want you, my man. I'm Mr. Robert Marmyon's solicitor, and I'm here on business. Now, Mr. Hodge?"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIRST DELEGATES.

"I SUPPOSE," remarked Plantagenet, with a cool yawn, "you want this room. Is that it?"

"We intend to have it," rejoined Mr. Ferretman, smiling.

"Do you?' rejoined Plantagenet, who had previously made up his mind to retire, though he hardly relished the lawyer's manner, but now being challenged altered his mind. "Do you? That is as I choose. Who's the fellow outside there with Robert? That Radical Republican ruffian, I fancy, to whom I am indebted for a broken arm? Well, in that case, no. I shall not submit to be turned out by you, whoever you are."

And he took out a cigar from his case and lit it.

"My name," observed the lawyer, "is Ferretman, and I'm the legal adviser of Mr. Robert Marmyon. Having come down from London with Mr. Hercules Flaymar to arrange certain matters with Mr. Marmyon, I must demand this room."

Plantagenet rose to his feet.

"Well, Mr. Lawyer," he said, "it's lucky for you I'm a cripple,

or by George you'd return to London the worse for your impudence. But it happens I've no desire to thwart Robert; so if I go you will understand it's on his account, not at your bidding."

"Pooh! What's the odds, as long as you do go?"

But Plantagenet had his own ideas; so, not stopping to bandy words with the man, he stalked out into the bar, the yokels by force of habit pulling their forelocks to him, and without noticing Hercules Flaymar, tapped Robert on the shoulder with "I want you!" in a tone of command.

"I can't attend to you now, sir," replied Robert, blushing foolishly. "You see, I'm engaged with these gentlemen."

"You must," said Plantagenet, gripping his arm with his one available hand and whispering in his ear, "Don't be a fool!"

Robert caught the hint, glanced up at the big gentleman, and obeyed mechanically.

"One word only. These people have come here to set a trap for you. Sign nothing. Promise me."

"They're men of honor," replied Robert, half angrily, trying to release himself.

"Then," said Plantagenet, "they will not ask for your signature. That lawyer wants you to instruct him to act for you. Be advised. Don't —I repeat in all sincerity—don't!"

Robert flinched, but he responded, quietly, "Perhaps you may be right; but they're my friends, don't you see?"

"I don't see. Anyhow, they're the wrong sort of friends for Sir Robert Marmyon's son to boast. But as regards mere friendship, that's another matter, and one in which I don't want to interfere. Good-by, Robert, we shall meet shortly, and trust to me to see you righted!"

Robert smiled, took the proffered hand coldly, and walked quickly into the parlor, where Messrs. Flaymar and Ferretman were already discussing hot rum.

He closed the door after him, and was not a little staggered when both men advancing at him possessed themselves of his hands and simultaneously patted him vigorously on the back, with the sentiment, "Luck, long life, and glory to Sir Robert Marmyon, the people's champion!"

"Stow that!" he pleaded, "I'm a Republican; I detest titles. They are so many dodges to impose on weak-minded idiots. You won't find me playing the fool here as a sham gentleman, with my father, mother, and brother ready to sink into the ground for shame because I've no manners and can't twist my tongue to fit with their talk. Not me!"

"Hear him!" laughed Hercules, affectedly.

"Hasn't quite yet--no, certainly, not quite!" echoed the jocose Ferretman.

"I mean it," said Robert, hardly relishing their rather theatrical badinage. "It's my intention to go to America, become a naturalized citizen of the Great Republic, and settle down there with my girl, don't you know, friends?"

"What?" roared Flaymar, "and desert the people of England when you might help them! That ain't like a patriot."

"Or a true citizen," protested Ferretman.

"It's my will, unless I change my mind," smiled Robert.

"My gay citizen," laughed Hercules. "Excuse me. You've been talking romantic rubbish. The idea of a man throwing away your chances. Why, it's lunacy!"

"Preposterous!" echoed Ferretman

"Come now; suppose we talk it over quietly. You're the heir, and can prove it. That is so. Now, have you any idea what your position is worth to-day?"

"Not I."

"Tell him, Ferretman, what you think."

"Well," remarked that luminary, "say a matter of a hundred thousand pounds. Bless you, I know all about the property. I was articled in the office of Bugglins & Flease, of Bedford Row, Sir Robert's lawyers, and a downright respectable old-established firm of conveyancers."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Hercules Flaymar, impatiently.

"Well, the estate may be worth seventeen, or may be worth twenty-two thousand a year. Anyhow, if you can prove your right under the entail I'll tell you what I'll do, my boy. I'll give you a hundred thousand for your chance. So there! That's an offer worth a thought, ain't it?"

Robert smiled feebly. Then he glanced at Mr. Ferretman's coat which was shabby, and at his hat which was worse. His boots, too, were not perfect, and his linen would have been none the less attractive for starch. Simple, unsophisticated soul as he was, it struck him that this didn't look much like a man worth what the stockbroker's term *a plum*.

"I have not yet proved my case," he replied, with dry emphasis.

"Of course not," coaxingly whispered Mr. Ferretman. "But I'll do that for you without charging you a penny, whether you win or lose. Provided," he added, "you and I understand each other. That's it, ain't it, Flaymar?"

"My dear friend," here interposed the deep bass voice of the orator, addressing itself to Robert—"you are inexperienced. You have no knowledge of the world. You might fall in with a set of harpies who'd have you—simply have you. It was to prevent that I brought down Ferretman. He will advise you as a friend and as a citizen, not, sir, of the American Republic—oh, no; but of our glorious English Democracy. Ferretman, did you bring your check-book?"

"Certainly, Flaymar," extracting that luxury from his breast-pocket.

"I may tell you, Marmyon," remarked Flaymar, "that the committee met on your business last night, and that I obtained their authorization for an immediate check to be drawn for you for twenty pounds, and Mr. Ferretman will write it for you if you will oblige with a pen and ink."

Robert smiled again weakly, but there crossed his face a look of suspicion. Possibly he remembered Plantagenet's kindly caution.

"No, thank you," he stammered. "Excuse me, sir; I've not made up my mind yet what course to adopt, and I don't want money. From what the gentleman who's just left says, I don't ex-

pect my rights will be denied me; indeed he's promised to do his best to secure them for me."

"Likely!" grunted Flaymar.

"I believe him. He is, after all, by birth one of the people. You have seen him at his worst, I at his best. He has his faults; they are perhaps those of the class with which he has associated rather than of the man; but anyhow he's honorable. So I'll tell you what I propose. I shall secure my rights—safe. Then I shall go to America and settle. When my father, Sir Robert, goes, if I should survive him, I shall divide the estate among the laborers who have worked on it all these years. Do you approve?"

"Hum!" dubiously. "I don't see anything in it; do you, Ferretman? Rather wild. Besides, by then George's plan will have come into operation, and there will be no more landlords. Better make hay while the sun shines."

"There's no hurry," remarked Robert, carelessly.

"Oh, no," rejoined Flaymar, with a rather disgusted air. "No hurry whatever. Only if you want our committee to assist, you must make up your mind We are not the style of people to shilly-shally."

"I don't at present require any assistance from anybody," rejoined Robert, demurely.

"Right you are, Robert," cried the voice of Martha Hodge. The good soul had been eavesdropping, in fact had overheard the latter part of the conversation. "Right you are. Don't you go to compromise yourself with nobody." And she confronted these candid friends with arms akimbo.

"Really," laughed Hercules Flaymar, cynically, "you take too much upon yourself, good Mrs. Hodge. This gentleman is not your son; no relation of yours, indeed. He can be trusted, surely, to consult his own interests."

"Didn't say he couldn't! Didn't say nothing except to advise him to look afore he leaps."

Robert glanced at his late mother. Plantagenet had gone—the noise of departing wheels had advised his ear of that. Had he been obtruding advice upon her? It seemed as if such were the case.

"I don't need advice," he remarked, coldly. "I am a man to go my own way, but not one to forget my friends, my benefactors, or my principles."

"Of course, my boy," interposed the judicious Ferretman. "I was talking to Flaymar as we came down in the train, and the very remark I made was, 'Marmyon's independent. He's stanch, and to be reckoned on. But he's his own master.' Didn't I, Flaymar?"

"And didn't I tell you," replied Hercules, contemptuously, "that it didn't signify a button to us whether our overtures were accepted or rejected? Faugh! The Central Democratic Leverage Union doesn't need the help of a Marmyon or anybody else. We don't work with units, be they big or small. Our unit is a million hands!"

"You'd better work with your own hands, and earn an honest living," scornfully rejoined Martha Hodge, "instead of dodging about the country setting the people's backs up. That's what I says."

"My good soul," answered Hercules, in a jocosely patronizing

tone, "you believe in the Bible, I suppose—all you good folks down in the country do. You nod your assent to that. Well, what does your inspired Apostle say? Isn't it something to this effect, 'I suffer not a woman to teach.' Hey, old lady? And what did Paul mean by that? Why, like a sensible man, that your sex should leave politics and pulpits alone. You've got your uses in the world—among others to fill empty glasses."

And he pointed significantly to his own tumbler, the contents whereof had been emptied into his inner man.

"For them as pays," sniffed Mrs. Hodge, haughtily.

"I pay," interposed Robert, sternly.

And, oddly enough, neither Hercules Flaymar nor Mr. Lawyer Ferretman entered a caveat against this arrangement; so with a glum expression Martha signaled to Belinda, who replenished the empty tumblers, and retired.

"Won't you drink, Citizen Marmyon?" inquired Mr. Ferretman.

"Not in my line, thanks," answered Robert.

"That's unlucky," suggested Hercules, "for we were going to put you on our committee, and one of our rules is that all must drink alike—to avoid jealousy, don't you see?"

"Quite so. Provided the liquor is, say, coffee."

"Ah," laughed Hercules, "the citizens consider that hardly inspiring enough. However, we must introduce you to our colleague, Mike Connolly. He'll enlighten him, won't he, Ferretman? If ever a man had a power of persuasion it's Mike. By George, he carries conviction in his pocket with him ready for all emergencies."

Whereat Mr. Ferretman roared, and Robert began to opine that the Central Democratic Leverage Union was doubtless a very useful and exalted association, but that the tone of its wire-pullers was, under a cloak of almost servile politeness, rather rowdy and dictatorial. There was something in the very laughter of this pair of worthies that grated on his ear.

However, after a little desultory talk, and a renewal of their disinterested offer of £20 down, which was even more firmly refused than before, Messrs. Flaymar and Ferretman, perceiving that no business was likely to be transacted, went back to town, their parting promise being that Mike Conolly should follow them.

"Mike will make a man of you," said Flaymar.

"Mike will exercise his persuasive gifts to your eternal benefit," laughed Ferretman. In fact to both this Irish committee-man seemed the most superlative of jokes.

As soon as they had taken their departure Robert asked Martha Hodge why she had intruded upon them.

"If you wants to know, I'll tell 'ee," was Martha's reply. "'Twas all along of that son of mine as turns his back upon the woman as brought him into the world," and a little hysterical sniff accompanied the protestation. "He it were who came to me, and he says, says he, 'stop it.' 'Stop what?' says I. 'Stop these rogues having him'—meaning thereby you, Robert. And so I done, and you oughter thank I."

"There was no need. Don't imagine I'm going to be led by the nose. I was armed at every point, as you saw."

"Don't be too conceited, young man. You're one of that lot as

thinks theirselves clever. So you is. But you isn't no match for they two. I looks 'em all over. I watches their little tricks. They was on to you, my bo-oy, and hain't done with you yet. And what's more, it's less nor nothing fellows of their kidney will stick at. They don't care, bless 'ee. Why should they? Heads I win, tails you lose. Trust a woman as hav' kept a public-'us for years to measure the length of their foot. Drop 'em, Robert. If they sends down that Irishman keep out of his way. You might as well go and pal with one of they gray adders up in the woods as with an Irishman."

"I'm not afraid of any of them," retorted Robert, proudly. "Besides, why should I be? They are my friends, and the true friends of the people. I may be Marmyon or Hodge—it's all one. I've thrown in my lot with the cause of those who work for their bread and eat what they earn, and against those who eat what others earn for them. Those are my principles, and funk shall not make me turn my coat."

"Belinda," remarked Martha Hodge, as she watched the retreating figure of this self-confident young man, "pride will have a fall. You mark my words. Robert were always uppish and upstart. Now his head's his heels, and his heels his head. They'll swindle him, will that lot. And what for? Because he took huff at Master Errol's speaking to his girl, though it never went beyond speech, and all of a sudden discovered that he was mighty ill-used. And here, before ever he's got a cause of complaint, and when he ought, if he were sensible, to pay court to Sir Robert, he goes and joins a conspiracy. 'Tis a conspiracy, if ever there were one, against the queen and the House of Lords, and all that. As if a feller like Flaymar could put down the queen! Let him try it on. He'll find out his mistake if he comes to tackle the soldiers and perleece and gentlemen and farmers, and everybody with a decent coat on his back. It's all nonsense, Belinda, and these chaps don't mean it. They talks for money, and they schemes for money, and there ain't no good in any one of 'em. I 'ates a cad!"

After this outburst of loyalty and constitutionalism, which Belinda ignored as being so much superfluous steam, Mrs. Hodge regaled herself with a nip. Then she sat down to her needle-work to snort and to mutter after the manner of women with irritable brains when thinking aloud.

At last she jumped up, and said to Belinda, "I'll mind the bar, girl. Just you put on your hat and run down the village to William's. Tell Polly I wants to see her, pertikler."

"I expects," observed Miss Belinda, yawning, "as Polly's keepin' company with Robert. They're mostly about together, now that Robert's got no work."

"Do as you're bid," said her mother.

That was enough for Miss Belinda, who departed, spent a long half-hour gossiping, and returned with the important intelligence that Venus was at the wash-tub and could not complete her lavatorial operations until tea-time, about which hour she hoped to be able to wait upon Mrs. Hodge, if that arrangement would suit.

Tea-time came, and with it, Polly. Robert, so she said, finding her engaged, not to say immersed, in soapsuds, had betaken himself to the Court to enjoy a chat with Hester Mazebrook, who was

deeply interested in procuring the reversal of her sentence of dismissal; and, indeed, through Widow Gipps, had preferred an urgent appeal to Robert, as the coming man, to plead her cause. Her argument had some logic in it, be it remarked, *passim*. She said to herself, "if they punish me for establishing their son's identity, they will have to quarrel with him. Leastways, he ought not to cast off the ladder by which he climbs to fortune." Hence she lost no time in cultivating Robert, and in endeavoring to secure his championship, a bit of diplomacy which she accentuated by means of some very superb champagne and sundry toothsome edibles, which were so grateful to the young man's palate as almost to reconcile him to the principle of aristocracy.

Polly was looking very sweet and saucy. Robert had prated about Texas and Manitoba, and endeavored to inflame her imagination with dreams of the giant rivers and endless prairies of the States. She, however, had her own imaginations, and they were emphatically home-made, and did not range across the Atlantic. It was good enough for her to be the Lady Marmyon of Marmyon Court, and by on means an unsatisfactory prospect to be Mrs. Robert Marmyon, with the reversion of ladyship. To be hen on her own dunghill was ambition enough for her simple soul, and she built innumerable aërial tableaux, wherein she figured as the center, the supreme Lady Bountiful, patronizing grandly Styles, the miller; Mrs. Rodd, the farmer's wife, whose "things" her own hands had washed; and all the Noakes, Stokes, Brown, and Jones proletariate of the village. In fact, just now she was living, moving, and breathing in dreamland. She had been laughing all the afternoon at the wash-tub as an immense joke—it seemed so utterly ridiculous for the embryo Lady Marmyon to be engaged in menial labor. Indeed, absence of mind had caused her both to scald her own fingers and to singe Mrs. Rodd's frilled petticoat. But these were trifles, and had no influence on her spirits. Indeed, she met Mrs. Hodge quietly, grandly, and condescendingly, as if nothing had happened.

"Well, Missus Hodge," drawled she, "and how do you do?"

"Pretty well, Pol; and how's yourself?"

"Middlin'! It's worritting of Robert to take hisself off to the Court, ain't it? But of course he feel a interest in the Court now, as he's able to consider it in a way as his own."

"Fiddle-sticks, gal!" cried Mrs. Hodge, to whom grandeur was repulsive. "'Tain't Robert's house yet, and maybe never will be, still less yours; for you ain't got either Robert or it just yet, miss. But there, I don't want to be disagreeable; I got a muffin for your tea. Here, my gal, stop your mouth with that," picking the fatty brown thing off the hob, "and listen to a woman hold enough to be your mother."

"Tain't bad! I likes muffins when they're well buttered."

"Yes; but that ain't it. What I wants to caution you about is this. Robert's a ass!"

"Missus Hodge—how dare you!" and down went the muffin, which one hand grasped, and the teacup in the other, with a bang.

"Keep your air on, young woman, please! What I says is for your good and his. Robert, my dear, he've got into the hands of a

couple of London sharpers. You must stop that, or, as my blessed name is Martha Hodge, they'll ruin him."

"Oh," remarked Polly, jauntily, "that's all, is it? Well, I bain't afeard. Robert's 'ead is as good as theirs. The parson, he says, as Robert ain't got a equal in the county of Kent."

"You'd better advise him," observed Mrs. Hodge, dryly.

Polly was about to reply, when to her amazement a stranger vaulted over the bar counter, opened the parlor door, and introduced himself *sans ceremonie.*

"A—ah now, it's Mrs. Hodge, sure! Didn't me oys desave me when I payped through the glass door and saw jist the tip of a faymale head? I'm a gintleman, Mrs. Hodge, dear, and I want a bid the very noight that is. Ye'll oblige a gintleman, sure? Arrah, the gyurl's pretthy, bedad," glancing at Polly, rather boldly too.

"No nonsense," rejoined Martha, sternly. "We don't allow this sort of thing here, sir."

"No offense, me dear lady, I beg. Promise me a shake-down, and bedad I'll ordther a bottle of champagne for the binifit of all consarned."

This sounded like business. Martha's voice altered accordingly from a tigerish contralto to a dove-like soprano, and she was at once his very humble servant.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SUPPLEMENTARY DELEGATE.

"HURROO!" cried the gay gentleman with the Milesian accent. "Marmyon's a charmin' village intoirely, and the Coort I'm tould's a foine place. The air too's lov'ly, exhil'rating, invig'rating, and the ladies is quoyte to moy taste. If now oid a woife as handsome as Widdy Hodge, whe'ew! Be jabers, will thin, I'd be as jolly as the fat ould praste of St. Garlath's, sure!"

And the man, not quite bad-looking for an Irishman, cast sheep's-eyes at Mrs. Hodge, who simpered, but affected annoyance, at this "deludhering" rhetoric.

"There," said she, "I 'ates compliments."

"Let me administer another whack of this divoine fluid, me dear lady. We'll have to be havin' a second bottil when this is done. And sure we mustn't be omittin' this purty gyurl here! H'wat's your name, now? Oid be bound it's Fan, or perhaps Sue, bedad." Polly laughed outright, but she relished the champagne, being in happy ignorance of its Saumuresque origin, and her look was that of amusement, not anger.

"Arrah, thin, Beautee, haven't ye a tongue?"

"Her name's Polly," laughed Mrs. Hodge. The profit on Saumur being only five shillings a bottle—not bad business—made her quite enter into the fun.

"And an altogether deloightful name. Is she your dot-ther, now, me dear lady?"

"Don't you be inquisitive, sir."

"She moight be yer dot-ther, thin saying she's as swate as sugar-candy. Here dhrink about. Another bottle of the raal ould stuff,

mother—me dear lady oi mayne. Here's to Vaynus and all the goddisses!"

"You're a funny man," murmured the silvery voice of Polly very demurely; albeit the champagne had relaxed her tongue.

"Thrue for you, miss. If it wasn't that I was engaged to the swate Widdy Hodge at the Marmyon Arms I'd be marryin' Polly; and bedad it oi was a Turruk oid marry the pair of yez and the gyurl in the bar too becase there's luck in odd numbers."

At this blarney Mrs. Hodge laughed hypocritically, but Polly in all sincerity. She really thought this Irish gentleman as good as a comic actor, and withal his profusion in the matter of champagne seemed commendable.

"About the bid, me dear lady. You'll give me a bid suitable to a gintleman wid a fither bid on the t'nop of it and a bowlster to match?"

This was a little incomprehensible to the Kentish ear.

"A bid!" echoed Martha. Then correcting herself, "Do you mean a bed? Well, as there's a gentleman just gone out of our best room, you can have that."

"A gintleman—'deed, sure? And h'wat moight the gintleman's name be? The Prince of Wales, now?"

"His name," said Martha, heaving a sigh, "was Hodge."

"And a purty name, too. Your fawther, I'll be bound, layste-ways your late husband's late fawther?"

"My son," answered Mrs. Hodge, with dignity.

"Oi beg pardon, me dear lady. I'd loike to make your son's acquaintance. He'd be to me as me own son. And, pray, is there anny other gintleman stoppin' in the hotel at the prisent?"

"No, there ain't," replied Mrs. Hodge, forgetting herself.

"Missus Hodge!" cried Polly, indignantly.

"Right you is, my gal. Why, if I weren't a forgettin' of poor Robert. Oh yes, he's a gentleman—a big un too."

"Seven t'hoot hoigh, maybe?"

"No, sir—not big in that sense. A gentleman of prop—that is to say, of expectations and position."

"A b'hig b'hug intoirely. Will, it's meself as will be proud to make the gintleman's acquaintance. And h'wat's his name, av ye plase?"

"That," smiled Martha, "you had better ask him yourself."

"Nivir. Oi couldn't be guilty of the importinence. Come now," seating himself close to Polly and looking into her eyes, "let me give ye another whack of this deludhering tippil, and then ye'll tell me the spalpeen's name. Arrah, be aisy."

For Polly did not require a further dose of the seductive chemical compound, which already had intensified the roses in her cheeks and caused her eyes to sparkle. So she resolutely declined his offer, which he as resolutely insisted on pressing upon her *vi et armis*. It was in the middle of a sort of scuffle that the door opened and in stalked Robert, his blood rather warmer than usual, not from Saumur, but from the effects of a real brand.

"Halloo, halloo!" he cried, "what's this? Who are you?"

"And be this and be that, who are you, me bhoy!" springing to his legs and facing Robert almost menacingly.

Robert did not answer, but his look was that of one angered beyond endurance, as he stood erect, ready.

The Irishman returned his stare for a minute only. Then he suddenly melted into a broad, heavy laugh, as he exclaimed,

"It's Robert Marmyon, I'll wh'ager me best hat!"

"Robert," whispered Polly, placing her hand on his shoulder, "there's no harm. It's only the gentleman's fun."

"And don't look like that!" urged Martha Hodge, in a tone of banter, being secretly apprehensive of a collision.

But Robert did not quite like it, nor did his face settle down till Polly seated him by her side, and the Irishman civilly said, "Whoever y'are, a glass of this st'huff won't be unacciptible."

"Nothing to drink, thanks," he replied; adding, "Yes, I do call myself Robert Marmyon. How did you guess my name?"

"Because, bedad, oive come here on purpose to mate Misther Robert Marmyon. That's whoy, sorr."

This last deferentially—quite.

"Indeed," replied Robert, "and if I may ask, as you say you've come to see me, who may you be?"

"Me name, sorr, is Mike Conolly."

"Oh," cried Robert, changing color, "Mr. Mike Conolly, a friend of Mr. Flaymar, I think?"

"The identical same, sorr, at your service."

"Good. We'll have a quiet chat presently," and he administered a meaningful look to Polly, indicating that she had better retire without delay.

Polly, however, on her part was quite indisposed to retreat. The Irishman was eccentric and free-handed. He had administered to her vanity a huge dose of flattery. He had made himself immensely agreeable. Why should she be ordered out of the room like a child? It became, she opined, a duty to assert herself. So she remained rooted to her seat while Mike talked and chaffed and extracted much laughter out of supine Martha Hodge.

Robert, willy nilly, had to put up with this rebelliousness on the part of Polly, and it certainly affected the expression of his countenance, which grew dull, saturnine, morose. In fact, the more jolly the Irishman was the more grim became his countenance, and at last, when the chaff was turned on him, he lit his pipe and strolled out into the stables.

Mike, with the quick perception of his nature, realizing that the young man's temper was ruffled, quickly followed him, not, however, before he had made Polly understand that he was her very ardent admirer. He found Robert in the stable-yard, alone.

"Warrum, sorr—at laste for the toime of year. Warrum, oi mane, in the parlor of the hotel, sure."

"I call it cold," replied Robert. "But it don't matter. Cold's no odds in this place. We don't get it bad."

"It's a swate spot," remarked Mike, "and I congratulate you, me friend, on havin' succayded to't."

"But I haven't," rejoined Robert, testily. "That's the nonsense Flaymar talked and his lawyer friend. Nothing's proved. They may dispute my pretensions, and even if they are admitted I'm un-

certain how to act. Flaymar wants me to sell my reversion and pocket the ready money, but—"

"Awhish! That's not his oidayr at all, at all. Flaymar, don't ye see, my bhoy, is all for sp'hout'n. He thinks he's goin' to convart this ould stup'd Tory count'three into a Republic by stump'n the towns and gett'n up maytins. Well, bedad, all that costs a dale o' money, and betwane you and oi, sorr, Flaymar hasn't got't. So he says to himself, oi'll just git this young chap to raise the dollars, d'ye see, and thin oi'll be kick'n up no end of a dust. That's Flaymar's mayn'n, sorr."

"I guessed something of the sort," observed Robert.

"Now, sorr, attind to me. Oi'm a laydin spirit in the Union. Oi'm as good as Flaymar, and betther, d'ye see. And me programme's not loike his, all blather and jabber. Me dear sorr," lowering his voice, "if you'll belave an Oirish gintleman of ancesthry and ould blood, won ounce of dynamite's a surer remedy for the wrongs of this count'three than all the spayches in the wurruld. Suppose now—oi'll p'hut a case by way of h'wat the lawyers call a hypot'thesis—suppose now oi were to p'hut a few pounds of that materil ondther that ould divil, the baronet's nose, and blow 'um to smithereens, hwoy, thin, sure the dollars would be yours to pouch without further bodtheration."

"Good gracious!" cried Robert, drawing back, "you don't mean that seriously, do you?"

"Will, be this and be that, oi'm not at all sure h'wat oi do mane. But h'woy not, me bhoy? Sure the ould divil's a tyrant. Sure he's a landlord. Sure he's the sworn inimy of the payple. And, be jabers, sure he stands in your loight, he does. 'Deed, sure, it stroikes me imagination forcibly that a pinch of dynamite's the oidintical cure for his complaint."

"And for mine also as soon as I become a landlord."

"Thrue for you, sorr. If we was to catch you daysorting the sacred cause of the payple, be this and be that, we'd sarve you worse nor that. Me dear bhoy, there's no backin' out of obleegations once incorred. Befor' you had an oidayr of bein' a barynet, or a gintleman at all, at all, for the mather of that, you joined us. Don't think to turrun yer back on the Republic. Don't think to alt'ther yer moind and be convarted to Tory principles. Bedad, sorr, if oi was to inhirit an estate of fifty thousand a year, oi'd give it up at once to the cause. We're not a-goin' to ask you to do that. But we ixpect you to shell out handsome."

"Or else?" asked Robert, disliking the collar.

"Don't go to ask me what's the alternative. Oi'd be sorry to see a foine young felly loike you c'hut off, sure, in the proim of loife and the mornin' of fortune. Annyhow, the Union's not be throifled wid, sorr."

"No more am I," replied Robert, haughtily. "It don't signify a rush whether I'm Hodge or Marmyon. Whichever I am, I boast in my veins the blood of the men of Kent, and we, my good Irish gentleman, have never yet worn the collar. We're an easy lot to lead, but hard to drive."

"Mayte us fair and frindly, sorr, and there'll be no nade of laydin' ner dthrivin' nayther."

"I met Flaymar fairly and as a friend this morning. I told him that my heart remains true as steel to the cause. But I had to add this, that I intended to serve it according to my lights, and independently. Certainly I've no notion of injuring Sir Robert. Why should I? He's my father, and it's not his fault that I've been left to shift—that is due to the selfishness of that woman indoors, who wanted to obtain my inheritance for her son. So, I repeat, no tricks with Sir Robert, or I and your Union split. Then, as I do not desire to injure Sir Robert, so neither will I disgrace him. If I came here as his son he would be ashamed of me and of the girl who will be my wife. That won't do for me. I propose to go to the States and settle. Should I survive Sir Robert I shall inherit this estate, which I shall then divide among the working-men, who have themselves and their forefathers before them labored upon it. Is that just?"

"It's moightily silly, sure. Besoides, that loine of business would not binifit the Union, bedad—not a dime. Arrah, it's out of the quistion. Can't be allowed at all, at all."

"Indeed!" rejoined Robert, coolly. "Then it's no use discussing it further. Besides, my pipe's out and it's cold. I shall think about turning in."

"Will, now, thin, darlint, oi've offinded you, and it's mesilf nivir intinded nothing of the sorrut. Layve the business for the prisint, and turn it over in yer moind at yer leisure. Maybe you'll catch a glimpse of the loight and be lid to parsave the vally of a dynamite policy. Anyhow, now's not the toime for moor talk, so let's enjoy a bit of supper—a chop now, or faix a rasher?"

"All right," responded Robert. "I've no doubt they'll give you something in the house."

"But, me bhoy, oi'll be losin' me app'tite intoirely onless you agray to ate as well. A chop now?"

"No, thank you."

"But, me bhoy, a bit o' muttin's a bit o' muttin, sure!"

"We don't call it beef in my country," rejoined Robert, with a cynical laugh. "But no. I'm going to walk home with my girl."

"The swate crayture in the parlor now! Be this and be that, Misther Marmyon, it's mesilf wishes I was you."

Robert could not help laughing at this frank avowal, and having nothing further to say led the way to the house.

Polly, however, had already taken her departure—in a bit of a huff, so Belinda whispered. This was awkward, for Robert had already had enough of Mr. Mike Conolly, whom he regarded as a very cold-blooded villain. He therefore slipped out and followed Polly to her humble domicile, leaving Martha Hodge to entertain the "raal ould Oirish gintleman," who proceeded to eat with the gusto of one who had not tasted meat for a month.

When he had finished he insisted on brewing a beaker of whiskey punch for the landlady, who, of course, it being all in the way of business, did not care to decline that poison. Now whiskey punch leads to confidence, and that was just what Mr. Mike wanted.

"Bedad," he remarked, "that fellow Marmyon's not the man to be your son, me dear lady. Your son, now, oi'll wager, is a loine sthrappin' crayture, loike yersilf, sure!"

Martha laughed. If he had called her an elephant or an angel, a

mermaid or a squaw, it would have been all the same in her ears—so long as he ordered drinks with that fascinatng recklessness of which he seemed to be master.

"My son," she replied, "is large—six foot odd inches, and broad in proportion. Compared with him, Robert's a chicken."

"And oi'll vinture to sormise, me dear lady, that in regord of intornal disposition your son's a dale the best of the two, gin'rous, now, and simple-horted?"

"He've got a temper, he have," remarked Martha.

"And the felly Marmyon—hasn't he won too? Bedad he's a 'cute won, and as obst'nate as any pig."

"He are a bit perverse," chimed in Martha.

"And who is't now that pulls the sthrings? That purty gyurl wid the oi's and oylash's, oi'll be bound! It will be moi duty, ma'am, to-morrow, to make the acquaintance of that same purty young crayture. Thrust an Oirish gintleman for connoodlin' the gyurls, sure! Oi'll be ayvin wid that divil of a chap yet, me dear lady."

"You'd better leave Polly alone," said Mrs. Hodge, "Robert's that jealous—well, if it hadn't been for his jelaousy my son 'ud be peaceful at the Court now, and I wish he were, I do."

And Mrs. Hodge set up just a little whimper. It might have been pique, it might have been the remembrance of Plantagenet's cool indifference, or it might have been the remembrance of Plantagenet' cool indifference, or it might have been the whiskey. Probably the emotion was produced by an amalgamation of all three.

"Jilious, thin, is he? I'd have thought so now. Did'nt admoire moi playn' wid the gyurl. Bedad, then, oi'll make the spalpeen of a Samson the tool of his Delilah, so oi will, me dear lady, befoor another day's over. And now for won moor lashin' of hwhiskey, and thin to the vartuous couch. Me good sowl, it's yer own liquer, and ye wouldn't go to be ashamed of't?"

The next morning Mr. Mike Conolly was not up with the lark. The meridian was more to his fancy, and he put in an appearance suggestive of headache. However, his capacity for assimilating food seemed unimpaired, and his spirits never flagged a second. Belinda was in attendance, her mother being completely *hors de combat*, the result of superimposing Pelion in the shape of inferior whiskey on the top of Ossa in the shape of inferior Saumur. Poor woman, for once the biter was sorely bit. In her misery she lay groaning and bemoaning the hard fate which—save the mark—had attracted her to a trade wherein total abstinence is professionally impossible.

"Thim eggs, me dear," remarked Mike to Belinda, "is the very issince of the fowls of the air—poorfict, intoirely. And to sind thim down oi'll take a draught that would satisfoy the fishes of the say."

"What's that?" inquired Miss Belinda, in her rustic simplicity.

"Just a woineglassful of nate brandee, me dear."

This variety of aqua totana was duly administered, and then Mr. Mike Conolly announced that he "filt loike a hayro."

The feeling of heroism, too, caused him to awake suddenly to business, for he had not—to be candid—descended upon the peaceful village of Marmyon merely to eat and drink.

"H'what's become of me Lorrud Marmyon?" he asked.

"Robert?" said Belinda. "Oh, he's gone to the Court to talk to the housekeeper. She's had a letter from my lady, and there was something in it about him, so she sent for him."

"Whe—ew! Well, perhaps it moight be wurrus. And h'where does the purty gyrul live—her that was here last noight?"

"Ah! that's tellings, sir!"

"She's not a patch upon you, me swate craytur. Not to be mintioned in the same hour, sure. You're the rose, and she, bedad, she's the primrose. But for all that, oi want to spake wid her, just to git her to prevint Misther Marmyon from makin' an ass of himself."

"Oh," muttered Belinda, blushing at these pointed compliments, "if that's all you want, I don't mind telling you. Across the green, turn to the left, third cottage."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LITTLE RIFT.

"WHEREVER is the Irishman, Conolly?"

"Gone back to London. Paid his score too, a matter of nigh two pound."

"Well, I'm not sorry he's gone, Belinda."

"And you hadn't need to, Robert."

"Hey! What d'ye mean, girl? What are you laughing at?"

"Nun—nothing, Robert."

Robert, however, seemed to be rather skeptical as to the veracity of this reply, for he stared hard at the rubicund Hebe, whom for so many years he regarded in the light of a sister, and as he turned away the blood rose to his temples.

"Well," she protested, with shy emphasis, "you didn't oughter go and be angry with me. Tain't my fault."

"I don't understand you."

"Nor you won't. If you want to know further, Robert, you'd best ask Polly."

"What!" he almost shrieked. "The Irishman gone! Ask Polly! What's all this mystery? Come."

And with his strong fingers he gripped Miss Belinda's arm, so that she winced again.

"Blest if I knows," whimpered the girl, half terrorized by his passionate mood. "The gentleman had his breakfast and then he marched straight off to Polly, and after an hour or so he came back, settled his score, and walked away toward the station, and—"

"And what?" in a voice of thunder.

"Polly walked toward the station with him."

Robert started, the color left his lips, and he pressed his hand on his heart. Then he turned aside, and as he did so Miss Belinda felt a pang of sorrow for the pain her mischievous tongue had caused. Well she might, for with his face to the wall, the strong young man quivered in every limb, and a sob burst from his breast as though his heart was breaking.

"There, there!" whispered Miss Belinda, coaxingly. "There's

no call to take on so, Robert—indeed there hain't. Polly's true to you. But that there Irish chap had a funny tongue of his own, and it made her laugh. That's the whole story, I be bound."

But Robert made no response. Perhaps he could not.

"Come, Robert, dear. You make me sorry that ever I spoke. Don't 'ee, dear boy, don't 'ee!"

For Robert was rocking himself as one in pain, and as she peeped round at him she perceived that his complexion was almost livid, and that his teeth were clinched convulsively.

They were standing in the old bar-parlor, the room so familiar to Robert from his earliest childhood, and Belinda with more than sisterly affection was doing her best to soothe him. Her efforts were in vain, for Robert seemed like one in a maze, and by his gestures he repulsed her attentions rudely. It was the early afternoon, and the temple of Bacchus was deserted, its votaries being engaged in their daily labor, so that there was no one to witness through the half-open door the mental agony of this tortured soul.

They stood there for some ten minutes, he writhing, yet but for his occasional sobs mute, she pouring into his ear words of sympathy. Like most animals the girl was kindly, and as soft-hearted as occasionally shrewish-tongued, but for all her entreaties and her protests on behalf of Polly not one syllable could she extract from his lips.

She had just resolved to try another tack, and the words, "Well you are a silly, Robert, and I couldn't have believed it of you," had barely escaped her lips when a merry laugh sounded outside—a laugh familiar to both—a laugh which caused Robert to pull himself together and stand erect, cold and defiant.

"Where's my Robert?"

No answer.

"If I was you," whispered Miss Belinda, "I'd go and have it out with her, Robert."

"Is that you there, Belinda?"

"Yes, it be, Polly."

"And where's my Robert? Why, sure-ly, that's him! Robert, what's become of your tongue?"

"Speak to her," muttered Belinda, in a low tone.

But the man addressed had evidently neither words at command nor the will to utter. With a look that Polly long remembered, he abruptly strode past her and out of the house, his teeth firmly set.

"What's up?" demanded the pretty girl, with just a little flush of resentment on her cheek.

"Why do you ask me?" rejoined Belinda, solemnly.

"Why not, please?"

"You'd best ask yourself," retorted Belinda, acrimoniously. "Of course Robert's put out at your gallivanting about with that there Irish chap."

"Then," responded Miss Polly, archly, "he must put himself right again. I wouldn't have spoke to the Irisher but on account of him."

"Oh—ah—yes! But you didn't refuse the Irisher's champagne, did you? And I can't see as there were any call for you to walk along with the feller to the station. Why, you might have been keepin' company with him, to act in that fashion."

"Oh," sneered Polly, "that's your opinion, is it, miss? Then keep it to yourself, miss. If Robert's jealous let him be so. 'Twill do him good and 'twon't hurt me. I'm not likely to be hard up for a lover."

"Blackberries," remarked Belinda, sententiously, "is plentifuller nor baronets."

"Bother baronets!" replied pretty Miss Polly. "And bother you as well! Robert's all right. No fear;" with which reassuring statement Polly departed homeward. There were arrears of washing to be cleared off, and she had already wasted a great portion of the morning, so she returned to her soapsuds to laugh, as at a great joke, at her Robert's jealousy, never doubting but that after the storm would come a delicious calm, singing to herself the while the refrain of Edwarde's Elizabethan madrigal:

"The falling out of faithful friends renewing is of love."

Nevertheless the evening came, and with twilight and darkness no Robert; and the morning dawned, and again there was no Robert. Next, Mrs. Gipps dropped in to upbraid her for having driven her boy, as the old soul persisted in dubbing him, far afield; and she learned that Robert had gone, no one knew whither. The news gave her rather a start, but she summoned up all her *sang froid*, smiled sweetly, and to the objurgations of Widow Gipps complacently vouchsafed the rejoinder, "No fear; he'll be back again soon. It's his tempers. That's all."

With the advent of Sunday, however, the day especially dedicated by the village to the service of the goddess of gossip, whoever in all Olympus she may be, the disappearance of Robert became so much of a sensation as to cause Miss Polly both inconvenience and pain. Girls passed old shepherd William's cottage and paused to stare at Polly. Yokels whom she had snubbed for Robert's sake, grinned sarcastically from ear to ear. Even her father, usually inclined to pet and make a fuss with her, turned rusty, and hazarded a cutting comment that she was an ass for her pains. In short, she was the talk of the village, and that lovely vision of being "My Lady," and patronizing all these humble but unsympathetic folk, vanished into thin air. For the first time in her life Polly felt that she hated her fellow-creatures, and that they were unworthy of a moment's consideration. Disappointment tones down to a dull gray even the bright sunshine of youth and beauty.

It was with the design of escaping impertinent curiosity that Polly, ere yet the village had supplemented the Sunday morning service by the regulation Sabbath gorge, slipped on her hat and tripped away unobserved to Flesset Wood. The ground was hard and crisp, for there had been a white frost, and the spray of the beeches was thickly coated with rime. A few struggling rays of orange sunshine checkered the huge, solemn wood, but nature was silent, and there seemed something shroud-like in the lifelessness and gloom of the day. She was alone now, and there were no wash-tub, no chatter, no voices of little brothers and sisters, no peevish plaint of mother, no gruff bassoon of father's greeting, and beyond all the music of Robert's whisper and the glamour of Robert's eyes were gone. She had borne up till now. Flesset Wood, however, made her cry. It was all that

melancholy wood, she told herself, and nothing to do with Robert or any other mundane consideration, merely the *genius loci*, the saddening spell of silence that forced her tears to fall in showers.

Presently a little bird dropped from a branch at her feet, as she slowly moved up the pathway. The thud of its fall startled her, and she paused involuntarily to see it give three convulsive struggles and then die. It was only frozen and starved, poor thing; and, after all, but a bird, and what is a bird more or less? Nevertheless, the small thing's fate brought fresh tears to her eyes. Now, however, she was able to assure herself that these tears, these idle tears, were all for the feathered songster, and not for Robert—most certainly not for Robert—he never entered her head till long after she began to cry, and the thought of him caused her to try and dry her tears, not very successfully, perhaps. Soon she got tired of strolling up this steep ascent, and the village below in the mid-distance seemed more cheery and cozy than this lonely eerie scene into which she had strayed. She had quite half a mind to turn back, but the thought of those peering, inquisitive eyes, and those sarcastic, cruel smiles deterred her. Coldness, solitude, and even tears were preferable to ridicule at this crisis in her young life, so she resolved to await the jangle of the bells which would summon the parish to Vespers.

When once these good, kind, amiable neighbors, friends and well-wishers were ensconced in their several pews she knew that she could steal home unobserved. After church it would be dark. They would close the shutters against rude starers, and there would be nobody to laugh at her soul's bitterness.

Listening for the bells—it was, though she knew it not, being unendowed with that necessary luxury, a watch, a good half hour before they were due—she fell into a brown-study. The center-point of that reverie was—need it be said?—one Mr. Robert erst Hodge, now Marmyon, and she was pondering whether it would not be the truest wisdom to patch up her tiff with Belinda and enlist that young person's services to discover the whereabouts of the truant, when her nose smelled something odd—very. What could it be? Tobacco? Very fragrant indeed was that odor, whereas, the stuff her father smoked nightly seemed to the feminine nostril only just preferable to manure. No, it could not be tobacco. It must be a cigar. A cigar it was, and the man who smoked it was in her wake, following her steps lightly. Could it be Robert? She had half a mind not to turn her head. Curiosity, however, is more potential in the female breast than any number of half minds, so she turned right about—to face Errol Marmyon.

"Ha! ha! Miss Polly, so at last I have caught you. I went down to your cottage, and they did not know what had become of you. Then I tried the Marmyon Arms, but you were not to be drawn there. At last I met a child, and, as luck would have it, inquired of her if she happened to have a notion of your whereabouts, and was told that you had been observed walking in the direction of Flesset Wood. So here I am, and—why, what's the matter? You've been crying, Polly."

"I—I don't know, sir."

"You don't know! Well, that, I believe, is a very ladylike

symptom. However, what I've run you to earth for is this—I want you to tell me where Robert is."

"I—I don't know, Mr. Errol."

"Don't know, again! Why, what?—I don't understand. Look here, my dear girl, you and I are to be brother and sister—sister-in-law, that is to say—so there need be no mystery between us. Sir Robert and my mother are coming here to-morrow, and they wish very particularly to see Robert—in fact, I came on in advance to arrange matters. And lo! behold my gay bird has flown; you must be in his secrets. Tell me all about it."

And he seized her hands, simply to arouse her attention.

"I don't know."

That was all. Her eyes were downcast, and a tear fell on the rimy pathway at his feet. She stood indeed almost like one dazed, certainly as one who has no words at command, and no mind to utter a syllable.

He dropped her hand suddenly, as a thought flashed across his quick, incisive brain.

"You two have split," he said, with curt emphasis.

Then she looked him straight in the eyes.

"Who told you that tale, Mr. Errol?"

"Nobody. But if you have not split, what is the meaning of your silence? You don't know anything, and pardon me, Polly, but you seem the picture of misery."

Again she looked him in the eyes—this time, however, by a supreme effort, for he had defined only too exactly her mental condition. She could not answer.

"You don't mean to tell me," whispered Errol, "that the fellow's sudden change of fortune has turned his head? You don't, surely, wish me to think that a man who boasts himself my brother can be base enough to throw over the girl he told us he adored?"

Polly hesitated. Then she fell back upon the previous meaningless formula, "I don't know."

"It is so," cried Errol, "and the man is a scoundrel! I suppose he fancies, now that he has a chance of being a gentleman, that he ought to marry a lady. As if any lady in the land would marry *him!*"

Contrary quite to Errol's expectations, this speech of his broke the ice. With angry eyes Polly rejoined,

"She might do worse, whoever she was. Robert may not be a gentleman, but there's not his equal to be found in all the courts and palaces of England!"

"Bravo! bravissimo," laughed Errol. "Why, Miss Polly, you've loosened your tongue. So Robert's all that, is he? Well, I suppose it's nothing more between you than a lovers' quarrel, and the bad halfpenny will turn up again. But I wish to goodness you could give me a hint when that event is likely to happen. *You* may not be over-anxious to see Mr. Robert—hem! Marmyon. I am."

Polly bit her lip at this sneer. But she was now completely shaken out of her condition of trance, and it occurred to her that the interview Sir Robert desired might really be of importance to her swain. So she replied, briefly, that Robert had left the village suddenly, adding that it was her own impression that he had gone to London.

Errol inquired what might have induced her to form that impression.

"It's only a guess," said Polly. "He may have gone anywhere, but London's the most likely, because—"

And she paused, feeling that she might say too much.

"Because?" echoed Errol, inquiringly.

"Well, because there have been some gentlemen down here to see him, and they've offered him money."

"Oh, ho! That's it. And the name of these gentlemen?"

Polly hesitated. "I am not sure whether I ought to say," she answered. "Robert's offended with me, and that's the truth, Mr. Errol, but his offense won't last. I'll be bound it won't. Only—only, I shouldn't like to go and do or say anything as would make things worse between us."

"Of course you would not. I understand the situation completely. But you may trust me thoroughly. I would not injure you, and though you mayn't believe me, Polly, I wouldn't injure Robert."

She looked at him dubiously, and reflected that he was capable of worse baseness than that of which he had accused Robert. The thought redoubled her caution, and caused her to falter, rather awkwardly,

"If you'll excuse me, sir, I'd rather not. I've let the cat out of the bag already too much. But if you wants to know all about Robert you've only got to ask Belinda Hodge. She knows more than I do. She was the last to see him before he left the village."

Errol smiled sardonically. She had given him information enough for his purpose, and therefore, with a bright smile and a gentle pressure of the girl's gloved hand, he turned on his heel and sought, as quickly as his legs would carry him, the society of Miss Belinda Hodge, a young person not much given to reticence, being in effect as incapable of retaining a secret as a sieve is water.

That evening Mr. Errol Marmyon might have been observed in a first-class carriage of the L. C. & D. R. *en route* for the metropolis, and later still in a hansom cab, to the driver whereof he issued a mandate to find out the head-quarters of the Central Democratic Leverage Union in Whitechapel.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PARSONSTOWN PFTHOGUE.

"Oi repate h'what I said befoor, me dear lady, that Marmyon's a foine place, intoirely."

Mrs. Hodge smirked. "It's quiet," she observed, dryly. "Not much business doing in our line except when gents happens to come down here for the 'untin', or the butterfly catchin' in the summer months, or a bean-feastin'. A good bean-feast does most for us, sir. 'Tain't only the wittles, it's the stablin' of the 'osses, and the liquors and tobaccos. I likes a bean-feast."

"In Oireland, now," rejoined Mr. Mike Conolly, "banes is not considthered a sufficient inducement to git pleasant upon. We'd

nivir foight over banes, ma'am. Praties, now, wid a soight of pot-theen, moight end in a swate shindy. Spaking of that same, me dear Mrs. Hodge, oid loike to be seein' you taste jist a dhrop of yer own delictable hwhiskey."

Martha would have blushed, if the color on her cheek had permitted any further shading. As it was she produced the poison so dear to Milesians, and they fell to talking.

Mr. Michael Conolly she soon perceived was a gentleman of an inquisitive turn of mind. He questioned and cross-questioned her, always, however, interspersing his catechism with chaff and compliments, whereof he appeared to possess an interminable store. From her he learned the whole history of the Marmyon family for the past half-century, and as much as Madame Boniface chose to tell about Robert—the one topic on which she was least disposed to wax confidential.

"'Deed, sure, thin," ejaculated the Irishman, with easily affected *insouciance*. "So Misther Robert Marmyon's engaged to be marr'ed to that lov'ly gyurl wid the oies loike the b'heautiful Mrs. Langthry! The baste! H'whoy, oid marry the gyurl mesilf for two twos."

"If she'd have you," laughed Martha Hodge.

"Have me, d'ye say? Bedad, oid loike to set oies upon the faymale woman that 'ud not have me! Whew! It's mesilf ondtherstands the art of conhwhounding them sillee animals, sure?"

"Well," remarked Martha Hodge, "there's nothing to stop you that I knows on. Robert he've gone and given her the go-by, so my gal tells me."

Mike Conolly looked odd, smiled meaningfully, and then rejoined, "Thrue for you, ould woman."

"What!" exclaimed Martha, indignantly.

"Swate crayture I mane," protested Mike; "sure, when I calls a young thing loike you, that moight be just turruned thirty sure, ould woman, it's a terrum of endearment, just as oi moight say to that spalpeen in the bar 'ould bhoy,' though, bedad, the felly's not out of his tanes."

But Mrs. Hodge was not quite inclined to be mollified by this explanation. It hardly dove-tailed with the pretty speeches Mr. Mike had evolved with such celerity as simply astonished her.

"What brings you down here again?" she inquired, in a sort of tone which seemed to suggest that his visits were not benevolent in their intention.

"Two sorrcumstances, me dear lady. Firrust and foremost, to see won Mrs. Martha Hodge."

"Oh, ah!" snapped Martha. "The old woman, eh?"

"The divoine imanation of Vanus, me dear."

"And the other reason, sir."

"That's tellin'. Maybe for raisons of importance oi'm anxious to renew me acquaintance wid that purty gyurl wid the oies, Polly—h'wat ye'd call her? The won that Marmyon's phitched overboard."

Mrs. Hodge opened her eyes very wide indeed.

"That's it, is it?" she remarked. "Then my compliments to that there gal, and you may tell her from me that I says, says I, 'tis best to be off with the old love afore you're on with the new!"

"Bedad, and a very purty sintimint, too; and sorra a bit o' difference it makes so long as she's on wid the new won, and that same new won's mesilf."

With which bit of Irish morality Mr. Conolly stuck his hat on the back of his head, his hand in his trousers' pocket, and, taking out his watch, muttered as to himself, "Train's in by now. Oi've not a moment to spare." Then he strolled off rather quickly in the direction of Shepherd Williams's cottage.

As he crossed the green, the carriage from the Court drove rapidly past, and he was able to make out the faces of Sir Robert and Lady Marmyon. A minute later, and he was standing outside the porchway of Williams's humble abode, thumping the door energetically to attract attention.

"Don't want any, thank'ee all the same," shouted a female voice from within.

"Arrah thin, it's not the peddler, sure it's me!" bellowed Mike, impatiently.

"And who be you?" demanded Mrs. Williams, holding the door ajar, and blinking in his face.

"A-whist, dear! 'Tis spache with yer dot-ther I'm askin' for a little minute. Be aisy now."

"My daughter, man? What do you want with her?"

"I'm commishuned to daliver a message to Miss Polly in porrson, ma'am, ave ye plaze."

The dignity of this utterance almost exceeding its impudence, commanded Mrs. Williams's attention. In a trice she fetched Polly from the back premises, and at a glance Mike perceived the change a week had wrought in her face. There were dark rings round those lustrous eyes, and the coral had fled from her lips. She met him, too, not only without one ray of sunshine, but in the most icy fashion.

"Yes, sir?"

Nothing could be colder than this, and, in truth, it all but staggered even Irish assurance. Quickly, however, recovering himself, Mike put on his most jaunty manner, as he whispered, "Oi've agrayable news for you, miss; leastways, I think so."

Curiosity is always a potent factor in matters feminine, yet even curiosity hardly attracted Polly, who raised her eyelashes languidly, as though no conceivable news could be to her agreeable in her present miserable frame of mind.

"Oi've come, sure," he whispered, for Mrs. Williams was in the background, all attention, "with a message from Mister Robert Marmyon."

Polly started, the color mantled her cheek, and her eye once more flashed its former fire.

"And what does Robert say?"

"H'wat do ye suppose, me dear child, except that he's sorry, he is, to have behaved himself loike a baste, and that he's on the road now from London to ax his swateheart's pardon."

Polly clapped her hands, and a ringing peal of merriment spoke of the sudden revulsion of feeling, which indeed was at once apparent in her every gesture.

"Coming back, is he?" she laughed, almost hysterically. "I'll

give it my master for treating me so! You'll see how I'll serve him out! Temper, indeed; to think of his showing off his temper to me! Thank you, Mr. Conolly, and you may tell him so when you see him."

"Hush, hush, Poll," murmured her mother.

"You'll set oies on 'um as soon as me," replied Mike. "Don't I tell ye he's on the road. Bedad, he'll be here afore ye can say Jack Robinson." And he looked almost anxiously toward the road leading from the station.

"La, la, la, la!" chirruped Miss Polly. "What a joke, to be sure. I shall meet him as glum as—as a haystack, unless he should be very humble indeed. Naughty thing!"

She was smiling and talking to herself rather than to Mike, who was eying her with a smile of intense amusement, while her mother stood by with an air of total puzzlement, quite unable, not being naturally quick-witted, to make it all out.

"A-whist!" suddenly muttered Mike, between his teeth. "The felly's comin'. That's his forrm and figure down the road, sure, or me oies desave me intoirely."

"Yes," gasped Polly, the color coming and going in her cheeks, and her bosom heaving strangely.

"Bedad, thin," cried Mike, hurriedly, "we'll be havin' a bit of fun, and make the felly jealous. Did y' ever hear, now, of the Parsonstown pfthogue?"

"The what?" asked Polly.

"Bedad, of coorse ye didn't. It's jist this, me dear. Ye see this goolden sovereign?"

"Is it a real one?" demanded Mrs. Williams, who keenly appreciated coin of the realm.

"Rale, did you say, mum? Take ut, mum. Ring ut, mum. Boite ut, mum. If it's not rale, moy name's not Mike Conolly. But to procade. Oi put the goolden sovereign between my lips, that away, d'ye see? Thin, Miss Polly there, she puts her lips to moine, and if she can take 't away bedad the sovereign's hers. That's the Parsonstown pfthogue. Now will ye thry, miss? Sure you'll land yer money, and make Robert that jealous, bedad, he won't be able to abear himself!"

Polly gave a little shriek, came forward, then drew back, and glanced round. Robert was approaching rapidly—almost within earshot.

"Once, twice, thrice. It's now or nivir!" urged Mike. "Befoor the young man comes, or not at all, and ye lose yer sovereign."

"Don't be silly, gal," cried Mrs. Williams. "A sovereign's a sovereign, and worth havin'."

Polly tittered convulsively, again gave a side-glance at Robert, and rushing up to Mike, put her hands upon his shoulders and her lips close to his. In a trice the sovereign was hers, not, however, before the Irishman had encircled her waist and kissed her in good hard earnest.

The entire performance did not take half a minute, and it was, of course, on her part sheer play, a girlish freak, but it had just the very effect Mike intended. In his own imagination he had prearranged this scene, and it succeeded beyond his expectations.

Robert, in fact, after a week of London and the society of Mr. Flaymar, for whom he soon began to acquire a positive aversion, had already more than half repented of his behavior to Polly. He had therefore come down to invite an explanation from her, and, in plain English, to make it up. It happened, however, that he had, with his customary frankness, confided this intention of his to Flaymar, who passed the intelligence on to Conolly. The Irishman, no less than the men with whom he was associated, perceived that the next move would be the emigration of Robert with his wife *in posse* to the United States, and this didn't at all suit their book. They regarded the heir of Marmyon as a pigeon to be plucked, as an endless mine of wealth, as the backbone of their organization, and they were not, therefore, prepared without a struggle to let so valuable a prize slip through their fingers. Accordingly Mike, as the man of infinite resource, was dispatched to Marmyon in advance of Robert to create by hook or by crook a breach between the lovers.

Robert Marmyon, although by origin of the inoperative class, had been trained as one of the people. By the side of a navvy he was a weakling, but his muscles were fairly developed. He was only of medium height, yet he possessed certain advantages, among them being a quick eye, a lissome figure, and a tough cuticle. Moreover, when his blood was roused he could be perfectly indifferent to pain, and though by no means powerful, was a fair light-weight boxer.

To his vision it seemed as though Polly had deliberately approached Mike, put her hands round his neck, and kissed him, the Irishman duly returning the compliment. Any other eye-witness of the scene would have formed the same conclusion. No marvel, therefore, that in an instant his anger and jealousy revived in the intensest form. He did not pause to inquire; he concluded at once that he was deceived.

In fact, scarcely had Mike released Polly, flushing with shame, from his grip, the miserable sovereign which had been the bait lying on the ground, than Mike received a startling blow which drew his blood.

"Robert, dear Robert!" shrieked Polly, essaying to throw herself between them, and in her frenzy of fear at the consequences which seemed likely to ensue from her silliness, clutching the arm of Mike with hysterical energy.

A blow, however, is enough to cause an Irishman to thirst for vengeance then and there. In an instant this ruffian, who had been all laughter and fun, threw off the mask, and to release himself from Polly, flung the poor girl with such force against the door-post that she reeled and fell in her mother's arms. Then he turned upon his antagonist with all the ferocity of a wild beast. It was an unequal contest. For all his blind rage and all his agility, Robert was no match for this Hibernian bravo, who was, moreover, a practiced boxer, and added to superior force a certain scientific knowledge of the mysteries of countering and feinting, whereof Robert was ignorant.

Thud—thud—fall. Thud, thud, thud, and Robert was down again. From the Marmyon Arms and the adjoining cottages and fields a dozen men began quickly to collect, a fight being the only bit of dramatic action ever witnessed by these simple yokels.

"Bravo, our Robert! Stand up to the fellew. Ha! now you've got it, my bo-oy, on the nob! Hit 'un straight, Robert. Darn my old parish, if he hain't one too much for 'ee."

This last bit of criticism as Robert went to grass for the tenth time, as though pole-axed, by a direct blow from Mike's left.

"Halloo! what's this?" interposed, suddenly, the calm voice of a gentleman—a voice familiar to all.

Dead silence.

"What, I repeat, is the meaning of this disgraceful scene? Of this gross breach of the peace?"

"It wasn't Robert's fault!" shrieked Mrs. Williams, coming forward and placing herself between Mike, who stood flushed with victory and grinning defiance, and Robert, who lay half stupefied on the roadway. "That there Irishman comes and kissed my Polly, as is the pore young chap's sweetheart, Sir Robert, and you can't blame him for interferin'."

"Bedad thin!" shouted Mike, defiantly. "Who's this felly? And what roight has he betwane us? Git up, you spalpeen," addressing Robert, who was slowly raising himself from the ground, "or it's mesilf will come and kick ye. Come on, ye young blackgard, till I mush you to a jelly!"

"Send for the constable," commanded Sir Robert, paling at this open defiance of his authority, "and let this man be removed. Now, some of you look alive! Here, Giles, Berry, Bowyer, do you hear me?"

But ere the words were out of his mouth, Mike, with a muttered Irish curse between his lips, went straight for him; and had not the baronet quickly stepped aside he would have measured his length on the road.

This was just too much for the Kentish men. They had not interfered to prevent what they regarded as a fair fight, albeit the stranger was in the wrong; but when they saw that Mike meant mischief to their squire, little as they loved him, they collared the fellow with fine promptitude.

"Lave alone, b'hoys! Sure the blackgard's only an ould divil of a landlord! Lave alone, I say, and it's mesilf will knock him to smithereens."

But Messrs. Giles, Berry, Bowyer, and the rest were collectively too many for Mr. Mike Conolly. They, honest fellows, were not the men to stand by calmly and witness the spectacle of a gentlemen of Sir Robert's years and physical feebleness being pounded to death by a powerful savage, and they simply dragged the man off, yelling, cursing, and struggling, Sir Robert calling after them, "Lock him up, and send for the police."

Then the baronet turned, half in anger, half in pity, to the man who was in truth his own son, to find that Mrs. Williams had already commenced the unpleasant task of washing his bruised and blood-bedraggled face. In a few minutes he had, indeed, received a frightful punishment, while his antagonist was hardly damaged at all—the general result of the *duello*, whether with fists or swords, being that the injured man suffers, the villain escapes.

"Disgusting," murmured Sir Robert, who was fairly nauseated by the scene and its phenomena.

"There!" whispered Mrs. Williams, compassionately, as she offered the wounded man a basin and a towel. "There, Robert, wash your hands and the side of your head. My! what a nasty cut you have got over your right ear. 'Tis a mercy the man hadn't killed you. And Polly, too—poor thing, she be quite stunned."

All this while Sir Robert stood silent, with his teeth firmly set, gazing with painful interest on his namesake, who made no reference to Mrs. Williams's kindly chatter. At last, however, the young man was purified from the befoulment of blood, and the good woman *sotto voce* proposed that he should come in-doors and rest while she tended to Polly. Then the cause of the baronet's mental abstraction became apparent. He had been awaiting Robert's rehabilitation for a definite purpose.

"My good fellow," he said, in his grandest tone, ere Robert could reply to Mrs. Williams's friendly overtures, "allow me to say this. You and I came down from town accidentally by the same train, but I was not aware of the circumstance until, on instituting inquiries at the Court as to whether you were still resident in the village, I learned that we had been co-travelers. I, therefore, lost no time in walking down to the village to hunt you up, for—to be perfectly frank—one reason why we have returned from Bournemouth is to come to such an arrangement with you as, I am in hopes—in very great hopes—may thoroughly meet your wishes. When I walked down here from the Court, I—a-hem—er—ah—that is to say, I did not anticipate this kind of—er—ah—scene, and it is, I own, the sort of thing I—er—ah—hardly appreciate; but as there seems to have been provocation—gross provocation on the part of that ruffianly person who has knocked you about so—I am indisposed to make any comment. However, you will oblige me by coming up to the Court at once. I have an especial reason for saying this, which I will reserve for your private ear. Will you come?"

Robert, as he faced his sire rather sheepishly, was still bleeding a little, and in acute pain both of mind and body. The tone of the baronet's utterance, however, seemed to appeal to his ear. There was something fatherly and condescending rather than patronizing in it, and when Sir Robert took his arm almost affectionately, and in view of the whole village, the young fellow was well-nigh affected to tears. He seemed to find here, at the critical moment of his life, balm for his troubled soul—sympathy when most he wanted it. "Thank you, Sir Robert," he replied, quietly, "I will obey your wishes."

As they moved away, Mrs. Williams ran after him and whispered in his ear, "You'll come see Poll, won't you, Robert?"

But Robert looked her straight in the eyes and vouchsafed no reply whatsoever.

* * * * * * *

"Mother," said Polly, that same evening, "I feel sick and shaken. Besides, something's wrong—something's gone very wrong. Of that I have a distinct presentiment."

"There, there, gal," answered good Mrs. Williams. "'Tain't no use worritting. You're a bit upset, and nat'ral enough too, considering all things, but you take your mother's word for it, the best as

is in this world is patience. When I gets the rheumaticks what does I say to myself? I says, says I, Sal Williams, there's a beginning to this yere pain, and there ll be a h'end on't. Things allers rights theirselves if you leave it to time."

"Yes," remarked Polly, drearily, "but love's not the same as rheumaticks, mother."

"No more I didn't go to say as it were," retorted her mother, loftily. "Rheumaticks is misery. Love is—"

"Agony," cried Polly, bursting into a torrent of tears. "Oh, mother, mother, how I wish all this business about the baronetcy and the estate had never come to spoil my poor life. It's unsettled Robert, and that's the truth. It's turned him against me. It's cast a shadow between us. And what does the squire and my lady want with him so very bad up at the Court, except 'tis to tell him that he must cast in his lot with them and marry one of their sort, or else they'll throw him overboard. I see it all; and to think that at this moment Robert should have an excuse for giving me up! Not that he wants to—I know better than that. He loves me as true as I love him. But it's all cross-purposes, that's what it is, and I'm confident there's mischief ahead of us both. A curse on the money, and the grandeur, and all of it! What do I care for money, or being better off than my neighbors? I'd be content with bread and cheese, anywhere—ay, even in America—along with him. They'll stop it. What is my heart and my life compared with their pride? Less than nothing. They'd as lief I was under the church-yard. That they would."

"Seems to me, gal, that you're a-talkin' wild," answered her mother, dryly.

Polly shivered at this cold speech, and, drawing her chair in front of the beechen fire, gazed at the ruddy glare long and silently.

Yet she could not keep what was in her heart entirely to herself, unsympathetic though her mother was. Anon she blurted out that she was only a wash-tub girl and unfit for him, anon that to take him from her was an inhuman act. And to add to her misery her head began to ache from the shock she had received, and her body to tremble.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Williams, rather alarmed at these symptoms. "Why, what's the matter, now? Can't you keep yourself quiet? Robert may look in to-night, maybe, or at all events to-morrow morning. Didn't that Irish chap say as he had come down in partickler to make up with you, and wasn't it so that he did come?"

"Yes," answered Polly, solemnly, "he did come. And for what? To see me kissed by that scoundrel of a fellow, and to get his poor face cut about and his body bruised for interfering. Will he love me for that, do you suppose, mother?"

"I told him to come and see you," pleaded Mrs. Williams.

"Yes!" cried she, eagerly, rising from her chair; "and what did he say?"

"Well," faltered her mother, rather posed by the directness of this query, "he didn't exactly say one way or t'other. Fact is, just as I asked him, Sir Robert he took him by the arm and led him away. But he didn't say he wouldn't; of that I'm certain, sure!"

Polly sunk back in her seat, and her face paled.

"He will not come," she gasped. "He will never, never come. I shall not see his face again."

"Stuff and rubbish!" protested Mrs. Williams; "if you goes on in this way I shall send up to the Court and ask for him to come."

"Mother," cried Polly, her lustrous eyes flashing, "you shall not do that. He shall come of his own accord, or not at all. But he will not come—at least, I think not."

And once more she wheeled round her chair to the embers, and fixed her gaze upon them intently, as though she could read in them her destiny.

"Will he, or will he not? He will; he will not; he will—he—Mother, what time is it, please?"

"Lawk, gal," cried Mrs. Williams, "how you do startle a body. Why, if you speak so loud, you'll go to wake the children upstairs."

"But the time—what time is it?" reiterated Polly, in an almost sepulchral tone.

"I—I can't hardly see," answered her mother, who had taken down Shephered Williams's watch from the shelf, and was holding it to the rushlight. "Why, never. 'Tain't stopped, and it's a true watch."

"Yes," interrupted Polly, impatiently, "the watch is right enough. But the time, mother?"

"Well, it be twelve minutes to nine. That it be, I do declare, and your father, Poll, ought to have done his glass at the Marmyon Arms by this time of night. I do hope as he bain't agoing to take to liquoring in his hold age. He allers were a temperate 'un."

"Mother," said Polly, turning her chair abruptly, as though irritated by this feeble chatter—"mother, do you hear me?"

"Why, yes, Poll, in course I hears. I hain't deaf yet."

Polly paused, as though she had a lump in her throat, coughed, then in a strange, hissing whisper, cried,

"Mother, shall I tell you something? If Robert comes he will be here by nine; and if he does not come then, he will come never, and—"

"What?"

"I SHALL DIE!"

They sat in dead silence for twelve minutes; then the village clock boomed the first stroke of nine, being echoed to the quarter-minute by the distant bell of the clock-tower at the Court. At that instant there was a step, and a hand on the door-handle fumbling oddly and unusually.

Both women sprung toward the door, as moved by the same impulse. It opened slowly, and there entered with a glassy eye Shepherd Williams.

CHAPTER XXI.

WILLING PATERNAL LOVE.

"Now," said Sir Robert, with an air of relief, as he and his vulgarian heir passed through the lodge gates, and were fairly out of sight of the peering, whispering, village folk, "do let us, my dear son, try and meet on the ground of common-sense. You and I have

much to settle of very grave importance to us both, and if I show myself, as I hope will be the case, conscientiously solicitous for your welfare, I have a right in return to beg that you will, so far as you can, comply with my wishes. What I mean is, don't interpose crotchets. I am the last man in the world, Robert, to wish to override honest scruples of conscience, but on the other hand I have no patience with mere figments of the brain—ideas that I am confident your better judgment must cordially repudiate before you are many years older."

Robert pressed his hand against his head. It was paining him rather acutely.

"You will find me pliant enough, Sir Robert," he replied, carelessly. "Things have altered since I last saw you, and I have undergone myself a singular change in the last few days. You are not speaking now to Robert Hodge—would to Heaven you were!—but to Robert Marmyon, a different and a disappointed man."

Sir Robert gazed askant at the purpling features of the young fellow at his side, and as he looked he fancied he detected a tear in his eye. The words, however, told their own tale, apart from any external manifestation of emotion, and they afforded the baronet the very cue he wanted.

"I see," he said, in a tone of delicate sympathy; "you have been deceived where you imagined you had every ground for according blind confidence? Yes. Well, remember this, my dear boy, it is better to be tricked and fooled before the wedding-ring binds you to your deceiver than afterward. Your honor is safe, at all events."

Robert made no response to this, but the words sunk into his heart. They sounded like worldly wisdom.

"Am I right?" inquired Sir Robert, who did not quite care to waste his sentiments on the desert air.

"I couldn't have believed it of Polly," answered Robert, in response, perhaps, to his own thought. "And yet there is no evidence like that of one's own eyes. They, at all events, don't humbug one.'

"My dear fellow," observed Sir Robert, in his most sententious style, "believe a man of the world when he assures you that the women of the lower order are—er—ah—as a rule marketable commodities. Virtue is said to be of homely growth, because it does not flourish in large cities. In my opinion, however, there can be no virtue apart from refinement."

But Robert was in no mood to digest paradoxical generalities. All he vouchsafed to respond was that it was a precious bad thing for any one to lose faith where it once had been given freely.

They were approaching the Court. Further conversation was, therefore, at this moment, impracticable, and Sir Robert, having a plan in his head, felt the necsssity of caution. He realized that the young man smarted under what he believed to be the falsity of his beautiful sweetheart, but he could not quite make out whether, even under this severe provocation, he had made up his mind to abandon her. He, therefore, for the nonce took refuge in a dignified silence, and on entering the mansion led the way to the library, ordering wine as an emollient for the man whose spirit seemed even more bruised and broken than was his body.

First, however, he took him into the billiard-room, adjoining

which was a lavatory, so as to give the poor fellow the benefit of a thorough purification. After that, and a couple of bumpers of Marmyon port, he reckoned—and rightly enough—that the elasticity of youth would reassert itself.

"Now, Robert," he began, as they composed themselves *vis-à-vis* in the comfortable library arm-chairs, "suppose we begin business. There's nothing like frankness to clear the atmosphere, so I will lead off by a confession."

Robert smiled. He was beginning to think that this sire of his was by no means the brutal, selfish, superb tyrant his imagination had hitherto depicted him, but a benevolent gentleman, tenacious of his rights, yet chivalrously honorable. Most assuredly, if circumstances alter cases they also vary estimates. The Melitese, for example, in the first instance voted a certain Paul of Tarsus a convict, and immediately afterward a god. By the same process of ratiocination Robert the younger vaulted abruptly from a belief that Robert the elder was a demon to a conviction that he was an angel in the disguise of a baronet. A few kind words, a grace of manner, and an assertion of personal interest, completely obliterated all remembrance of Maidstone jail and starvation wages. In fact, in his present frame of mind, this ex-proletarian almost contrived to arrive at the conclusion that the working-class gets its deserts in full from its kind patrons and employers.

The benignant smile on the young man's face encouraged the baronet to proceed.

"A confession," he reiterated. "It is this: When first Martha Hodge revealed the astounding intelligence that Plantagenet was no child of ours, and that you were our son, Lady Marmyon and I were—you'll excuse complete candor—puzzled how to act—I may say with truth, how to feel. We had for over twenty years regarded one man as a child, nay, more, as the heir, and the others as a dependant. Don't blame us if at a moment's notice we failed to perceive our strict duty; or at all events give us full credit for sincerity, in that we held our judgment suspended and took time for reflection. The whole situation bristled with difficulties such as a man circumstanced as you have been all your life can hardly appreciate. Besides which you yourself interposed at the outset a barrier to what I have since been led to consider as the right, the wise, and the manly course for me to pursue. You stated your wish to emigrate with the girl of your choice, to abandon all pretensions to the title and estate, and if I understood your meaning aright, to efface yourself. Am I interpreting your words correctly?"

"Yes; that was my meaning."

"We might have closed with that proposition of yours. We might, in plain English, have shunted you. We did nothing of the kind. Speaking on my own behalf, I may say that it jarred against my sense of rectitude to turn adrift the son of my body, my eldest son. Remember this, Robert, that it is no fault of mine or of your mother that you have been all these years supplanted by the child of that designing woman, Hodge. Certainly not. It is no more my fault than it is yours. But from the moment I became certified of the error that has been perpetrated, it became a duty incumbent on me to endeavor to rectify that error to the utmost of my ability, to take

care that one who had suffered already so much should suffer no more. I did not, I own, rise to that sense of my plain duty all at once. There were difficulties, as I have said—your lack of education and culture, your engagement to that very pretty yet, as it proves, that false girl. And it happened for the nonce that these barriers obscured in my mind the true instinct of obligation. Providentially, the chapter of accidents has been in your favor. To avoid the pain of having to reveal his identity to that worthy fellow, Plantagenet, whose honesty I shall ever respect, Lady Marmyon and I went on a visit to Bournemouth. There we encountered an old college friend of mine, the Bishop of Teheran, who is in England for the benefit of his health, and will, I trust, on no account venture to return to his diocese. Well, there's an old maxim, Robert, *nemo fuit judex in propositâ causâ*, which being interpreted means, 'never sit in judgment on your own difficulties.' So I thought I would solicit the good bishop's advice—he used in the old days to row stroke of our college boat, and I was bow, so that I have been accustomed from my youth up to take the word from him. Eh, what?"

This last exclamation to the flunky, who had entered abruptly and muttered something inaudibly.

"My lady, Sir Robert, desires to know if it is your wish that she should come into the library now?"

"Er—ah. No. Tell Lady Marmyon that I am engaged with this gentle—with—er—ah—Mr. Robert Marmyon for the present, and that I will send for her when we are ready to talk to her.

"As I was remarking," continued Sir Robert, once more subsiding into the recesses of his arm-chair, "the good bishop and I discussed this problem over a manilla—capital manillas they have in Persia, you can't buy them in London—and, if I may say so, I saw daylight through his lordship's spectacles. This is what he said—in effect. 'You, Sir Robert Marmyon, owe a duty to this young man as your own flesh and blood. He owes a duty to you as his father. Your duty should lead you to do all in your power to qualify him for the high position which in the future will be his by inheritance. His duty is to co-operate with you in that benevolent design.' Am I quite clear, Robert?"

"As plain as words can be."

"Here, however, again to be perfectly frank, I had to state a grave obstacle to the course of action suggested by the bishop. I put this question to him: 'Suppose we educate our son? He is not so old as to be unable to acquire knowledge, and perhaps culture, and his abilities, we are assured, are of the highest order. And further, suppose he marries this Delilah of his. She is not by birth a lady, and to dream of giving her education and manners is absurd. You may manufacture a gentleman, but a lady—no! The bishop pondered over this problem seriously. Like myself he was far too punctiliously honorable to suggest that you should fling over the girl without cause, but he could not underrate the obstacle. All he said was this—'Robert is young, so is the girl. Do they know their minds? Above all, does Robert love the girl so intensely as to be willing—in cold blood, mind you, in cold blood—to give up his future for her?'"

"I did," observed the young man, in a strange, sepulchral tone. "I would have begged and starved for her."

Sir Robert tried hard to suppress a smile at this vehemence. Then he added, quietly, "The bishop's advice, to come to the point, was this, that you should go abroad for six or twelve months, with a tutor, to see the world; and if on your return you had not changed your mind, then that we should acquiesce in your project of emigration. If the reverse, that we should receive you here, and recognize you as our heir."

"The bishop," observed Robert, "reckoned without his host. If Polly Williams had stuck by me, I'd have stuck by her—to the death!"

"Yes," responded Sir Robert, politely, "I quite believe that. But of course now the case is altered."

"And—"

"Simply this. Lady Marmyon, your mother, and I beg you, as our son, to make an effort to elevate yourself to our level in the social scale. You have in your veins the blood of centuries of knights and gentlemen. You boast a fine brain, capable of development. Fall in, then, with the plan we have formed for your benefit, which is simply this—a young Oxonian of our acquaintance, a clever and agreeable man, wishes to travel. Join him; he will give you daily some little instruction. You will run over Europe, see a little of India and China, then visit that pet illusion of yours, the United States, and so home. You will have seen half the world, and I undertake to provide you both with ample resources. When you return, you will be welcome here, and, I will add, as you seem to have mentally sketched certain philanthropic plans for the amelioration of the working-men on my estate, I shall be prepared to consider them, and, if practicable, to adopt them."

Robert sprung to his feet. "Sir Robert," he said, with emotion, "I know not whether this is pride, duty, or parental affection, but be the motive what it may, I see that you mean to be a father to me."

"I hope so, I pray so, dear Robert."

"And I should be worse than a brute if I refused to meet your wishes. I will obey them, Sir Robert, for your sake. For my own I want nothing. My life is broken, shattered, lost!"

"Don't say that."

"I can't help it. The words seem to burn my tongue. You don't know—nobody can know—how I loved that girl; how"—with a sob—"I love her still! And oh, pity, pity, Sir Robert, what will become of her when I am gone?"

The baronet involuntarily bit his lip with vexation, but he was a good actor and concealed his chagrin cleverly.

"If you mean," he said, "that the girl must be kept out of mischief, I'll guarantee that."

"She will be the victim of that Irish blackguard," groaned Robert.

"No; I pledge you my word to the contrary. Recollect, my son, I am paramount here. If I make old Williams understand that I must be obeyed, and that it will be worth his while to see that I am obeyed, do you imagine that I shall be thwarted?"

"And you pledge me your word, Sir Robert?"

"By my honor, as a gentleman."

"Then, I obey, freely, readily. My conscience is clear. But I do so on this understanding, that I am following the bishop's advice to the letter. I leave England, and Polly. Should I return and find that I can not live without her, and that she has been acting differently—I mean that she has no lovers, and has kept herself for me—I may without breaking faith with you make her my wife, provided always that we emigrate. Is that so?"

Sir Robert winced, but he answered, "Yes," his reflection being that in the course of twelve months much might happen; above all, that Robert himself might change. "And now," he added, rather nervously, "for a word with Lady Marmyon, and then, as I am going to town, perhaps you will join me, and we can at once make the necessary arrangements."

Robert looked a little surprised at the suddenness of this move, but he was really indifferent as regarded himself, while in respect of Polly he preferred to leave her to her own reflections. That was his vendetta.

There was, however, no time for turning over in his mind a plan so hastily sprung upon him, for Lady Marmyon came sailing into the room with outstretched hands, and a smile of welcome on her courtly features.

"So," said she, "we are to think of you as our son. Well, you are certainly the image of Sir Robert, with something of the expression of my poor brother. But," with a little laugh, "how swarthy you are, and what a hard hand you have!"

"Honest labor, my dear," interposed Sir Robert.

"And—and—what's the matter with your face and head?" inquired Lady Marmyon. "Have you had an accident?"

"It was done on purpose, my lady," smiled Robert, rather awkwardly.

With the baronet he was at ease; with her ladyship much the reverse.

"Er—ah—" explained Sir Robert, "he behaved with gallantry. An Irish ruffian, it appears, got up an affair with Williams's daughter!"

"Oh!" interrupted Lady Marmyon, "that very lovely girl that you talked about marrying?" addressing Robert in the most saccharine of tones.

"Yes," responded her husband quickly. "And naturally Robert resented the man's behavior and the girl's infidelity, and so he took the law into his own hands."

"How very odd," soliloquized her ladyship, as though a single combat with fists was an unheard-of event in this planet. "But surely that was wrong of the girl Williams?"

"So wrong," observed Sir Robert, "that I think Robert will hesitate before hazarding his happiness with any young woman of that sort."

But Robert did not utter. He may have acquiesced, but he thought his relations with Polly too sacred to be chattered about even by his newly-discovered parents.

"It is all very strange!" remarked her ladyship, after a prolonged and gawky pause.

"Strange but true," aphorized Sir Robert. "However, let me see," taking out his watch, "it's—er—ah—later than I thought. I must be in town to-night, and Robert has agreed to be my companion. I shall wire St. Vincent to meet us at the Grand to-morrow morning, and also to Errol, who will arrange for a suitable outfit for you, my dear son."

Robert looked surprised. Everything seemed so cut and dried.

"By the way," added the baronet, "I ought to explain that Horace St. Vincent is the Oxford man I alluded to, and—"

"And my cousin," interrupted Lady Marmyon, with some hauteur.

"And your future traveling companion, Robert. You will find him an easy, pleasant, careless man of the world. He is a musician, speaks all the living and dead languages, has a keen appreciation of art, and an endless storage of anecdote. He knows everybody—grand-dukes, royalties, singers, scribblers, and brokers. I may say with truth that he has no particular principles—"

"Except," again interrupted my lady, "the principle of honor. He is—ahem—my cousin."

"Of course, of course," laughed Sir Robert. "All I mean is that he is a political Agnostic, talks Imperialism, Radicalism, and Communism in the same breath, and I defy anybody to say whether he believes most in Loyola or Huxley. The man, in short, is a kaleidoscope, immensely charming, quite the sort of fellow I should select as the best of good company, if I were going a-roaming."

"But," faltered Robert, rather appalled at this Crichtonish character, "I'm afraid he'll find me much the reverse."

"There you're wrong," warbled Lady Marmyon. "Horace could not stand one of your average fellows, who are the precise double of everybody else. You are different. He will appreciate more than most men your originality and independence."

"Moreover," murmured Sir Robert, "he owes a pile of gratitude to me, and—you take my word for it—he will be more anxious to cultivate my son than my son to acquire his esteem. Ha!"—turning to the footman—"carriage at the door. Quite so. I'm ready. And, by the bye, it's cold. Fetch my seal-skin great-coat for Mr. Robert."

A rather hypocritical adieu from Lady Marmyon, and Robert found himself seated side by side with the baronet, whom he had feared and hated all his life, whirling down the avenue. The seal-skin coat struck him as the perfection of comfort, and the bear-skin rug the identical wrap for winter weather. In fact his sensations were as peculiar, almost, as if he had been suddenly watted to another planet. It was only as the carriage rolled past Shepherd Williams's cottage that he felt a pang, but he dismissed by an effort the bitter thought, having inwardly resolved to forget—if he could.

They caught the train with just one minute to spare, and seemed to be at the Victoria almost before one half of the allotted hour and a quarter had been passed. Then they drove to the Grand Hotel, and Robert had the honor, for the first time in his life, of sitting down to dinner with his own father. The repast appeared luxurious, and the baronet was so good a talker that the *gêne* of a *tête-à-tête* dinner in a private room did not oppress him. Moreover, to his

astonishment, he found Sir Robert brimming over with all sorts of projects for the mental and moral elevation of the poorer inhabitants of towns, a cornucopia of charity which, the young man could but reflect, might appropriately have begun to pour at home. It is marvelous how philanthropic people can be so long as the cost thereof does not pinch their own purse.

Thus in quietude and comfort the evening passed away, and Robert retired to a bed, which was constructed to invite slumber, so fascinated by the glamour of his new surroundings as quite to forget all about his bruised and swollen features, the cut on his head, and most things connected with the old and humbler life except Polly.

He could not forget his love, yet he thought of her angrily as he laid his limbs to rest as a gentleman for the first time in his life.

CHAPTER XXII.

TWO EPISODES.

As Sir Robert and his elder son were journeying up from Kent, Errol Marmyon happened to be driving in the not very aristocratic parish of Whitechapel. He had directed the Jarvey of his hansom to a street bearing the euphemistic title "Blackpudding," but Jarvey missed his way. He was an aristocratic Jarvey, whose haunts habitual were western, and in that undiscovered eastern clime he had no chart to guide him.

"You're going all wrong!" shouted Errol, through the aperture in the roof. "Didn't I tell you 'Blackpudding Street'?"

Jarvey muttered something between his teeth, pulled up sharp, and bouted ship without taking the trouble to glance over his shoulder. The consequence was that another hansom in his rear descended with the crash of a broadside upon his flank, and before Errol could utter a word he was lying capsized on the pavement.

Being quick and light of limb, he scrambled out somehow to discover his Jarvey bleeding at the nose, having pitched upon that prominent organ, the other Jarvey in a state of mute misery, his horse being severely damaged, and the occupant of his cab on the pavement giving vent to English of the most river-side variety, in the most raucous and rageous of tones.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed, as soon as he caught sight of this infuriated individual. "Why, Captain Dolopy!"

"Errol Marmyon, by all that's profane! And what, if you please, are you doing in Whitechapel, my dearest boy?"

Errol laughed as he rubbed his bruises. "Business," he replied, jauntily. "And you, my gallant captain, what fascination has the Orient for you?"

"Did you ever know such a couple of idiots as these drivers?" was the crooked answer. "Here I've an appointment overdue, and that poor wretch of a horse on the road there is only fit for the knacker's, and your hansom horse is not much better, while both cabs seem to have gone to pieces. It's my luck. If I ever happen to be in a hurry, an accident is a certainty."

"But," urged Errol, in answer to this logic, "I'm not in a hurry, and yet I've come to grief."

"Oh, you!" retorted Dolopy, "you're not a case in point. You've got capital, connection, everything. It's poor animals like me to whom Fate is so amazingly contradictious. Give you my word if I bull, Mephistopheles behind the scenes bears, and if I bear, he bulls. I always make a rule of telling my dearest friends whether I speculate for the rise or fall in order that they may go against me, and the benefit I've been in consequence to my fellow-creatures is incalculable."

"Yes," drawled Errol, "but in the present instance—"

"Nobody's the better. And yet I don't know. This is an accidental meeting—very accidental—but it may enable me to do you a good turn. You're not in a hurry, are you?"

Errol responded in the negative.

"That's all right. Then let's square these cabbies. It isn't far from here."

"What is it?" inquired Errol, administering a miserable half-crown to his crestfallen Jarvey.

"Well," replied Captain Dolopy, "it's this. The tram from Algiers to Natal direct has not been taken up either by the public or the House, so that in fact—as it's no use crying over spilled milk, don't you know?—I am directing my colossal energies toward another concern. The public, my dear boy, is not just now in the temper to look at foreign investments; electricity's played out; so's mines; so's water-works; so's everything except legitimate commercial businesses. Do you follow me?"

"Oh, yes!"

"A good paying concern, manufacturing for preference, is what investors will bite at. Now, I've got one, and I'll tell you what I'll do for you—I'll put you on the Board, and give you your qualification."

"But what is it?" inquired Errol.

"First-rate business! Couldn't be better! Fifty per cent. net profit. No risk. Ample and steady demand. Manufacture of vintage wines."

"Manufacture!" echoed the other in a tone of amused incredulity.

"Well, not to beat about the bush, that's the right word. Of course, the wine is not really vintage; in fact, there's not a drop of wine used in the process. But for an imitation, it's perfect. You must taste our '34 port, or Amontillado twelve years in bottle, our Pommery, our Chateaux Margaux and Steinberg Cabinet. These, however, are only the curios of the establishment. We can give you, sir, a really sound vintage port, at a net cost price of fivepence half-penny a bottle. You must try a glass."

"Well, thank you, but—"

"Oh, don't be shy! It's perfectly wholesome, and you've already drunk it hundreds of times without knowing it, only you've paid sixpence a glass, and we can make it cost price *per bottle* for less than that sum."

And he turned down an alley, through a dilapidated pair of gates, and into a court-yard emitting, to Errol Marmyon's mind a singularly disgusting and acid odor. Then they entered a passage which led to an office, the characteristic of which was shabbiness plus dirt.

"There!" exclaimed Captain Dolopy. "There you see business.

No plate-glass, no grandeur, no deception. The difficulty is, how to take the public into our confidence without letting the cat out of the bag and spoiling the trade. Still it's to be done by very careful wording. Did you ever write a prospectus?"

"Not exactly," remarked Errol. "They don't award honors for prospectus-writing at Oxford."

"More fools they," replied the promoting captain. "It ought to form an element in the education of every man who expects to make his way in the world."

In the meanwhile, in obedience to a signal from Captain Dolopy, a rather Israelitish-looking boy evolved, from his inner consciousness apparently, a bottle of wine. The bottle was supremely dirty, and the services of all the spiders in Whitechapel seemed to have been call into requisition to impart to it the regulation cobwebby appearance. It was chalked, too, on the other side, to indicate where the crust would have been, had there been a crust at all to coagulate, while the cork might, from its extreme antiquity, have been the personal property of Methuselah. This bottle Captain Dolopy received with reverence, as though not to "keep this side up" were sacrilege, and extracting a corkscrew from a cupboard, proceeded to remove the cork. At his command the Hebricule brought a brace of glasses, and having helped himself, and partaken, he passed the verdict "Beautiful!"

With rather a wry visage Errol was persuaded to put his lips to this decoction, which his friend had gulped down almost greedily. In respect of taste, he found nothing to grumble at, but rather the reverse. Indeed, after imbibing bumper number one, he demanded a second edition.

"That's right," replied Dolopy. "Do you no end of good after your pip, my boy."

"But," protested Errol, as he placed his glass on the table, "that's wine—real *bona fide* wine."

"Of course it is. That is to say, it's wine in the ordinary acceptation of the word. You drink it at your club, at the theater, at the wine-bar, in private society. It's the same game all round. You fancy you're eating butter. Not a bit of it. Your butter is beef-suet. Your bread contains other elements than wheat. Your Wiltshire bacon hails from Chicago, your prime rump-steak from Texas. As for tea—I'll tell you what it is, my friend Marmyon, when I've settled this wine business I'm going into tea, and after that I may touch beer. But—I was forgetting—you appreciate our '34 port, now you must try our Amontillado. It's softer than silk."

With the listless air of an idle man, Errol fell in with the notion, and after criticising Captain Dolopy's artificial sherry, proceeded to taste his champagne, claret, and other so-called wines. The deception, he was forced to admit, was in most instances perfect, for the flavor was good, and the coarse, common spirit which formed their basis was somehow non-apparent. Nevertheless, after this course of criticism, he felt just a trifle exhilarated, and he did not hesitate to fall in with Captain Dolopy's proposition that he should join the Board of Directors of a company, to be forthwith called into existence in order to work the business, and acquire the secrets of manufacture.

This being all that Dolopy wanted, viz, the use of his ancestral name for the purposes of financing, Errol was permitted to take his leave, and under the guidance of the Hebricule, he soon discovered the geographical positon of Blackpudding Street, wherein were situate the head-quarters of the Central Democratic Leverage Union.

Mr. Flaymar was in, and received Errol by no means as a stranger, but with a certain show of deference, indicative, perhaps, of an understanding between them.

"What is the news?" asked Errol, sharply.

Flaymar shook his head mysteriously. Then he made response in a half-whisper, as though the walls had ears, "The fat's in the fire!"

"Fat—fire—what do you mean?"

"This, sir. Conolly went down by train to Marmyon, and I've just received a wire to say that there's been a sort of a fight between him and Robert. But that ain't all."

"He's never—killed—Robert?"

"Well, no, not that. That would not suit us, sir. But he's in the hands of the police, and by the orders of the baronet, your father."

"And Robert?"

"I don't know anything about him. Conolly has wired for me or some one to go bail for him."

"Bother!" ejaculated Errol, whose face was flushed with Dolopy's artificial wine. "That fellow Conolly must be an Irish lunatic to strike Robert."

"Conolly, sir," retorted Mr. Hercules Flaymar, bridling angrily, "is, I would have you understand, a personal friend of mine, and a leading member of this important political organization."

Errol responded with a gesture of contempt.

"Conolly," he replied, "was to render the rupture between this fellow who is, I suppose, my brother, and that girl Williams, final. But he was to effect this without violence or publicity. On that understanding I gave him twenty pounds."

"Yes, yes, sir. But suppose the young fellow Robert, in a fit of jealousy, hit the first blow? Conolly in his telegram says, 'Not my fault,' so he may have been forced into the row."

"Don't tell me. An Irishman never needs any forcing to make him fight."

"Well, sir," observed Mr. Flaymar, drawing himself up to his full height and eying Errol Marmyon, much as though he hated him about as profoundly as he scorned his underhand ways, "all I have to remark is that it's no use your coming Jupiter over us here. You invited yourself into our premises yesterday evening. Nobody asked you to honor us with your presence, and nobody here was likely ever to do so, you being an aristocrat and we a revolutionary association. Nevertheless, as Mr. Robert Marmyon is one of us, and as you were able to prove to me that our interests coincided with the wishes of your family, I tried to meet you in an amicable spirit. We agreed that this silly project of emigration and self-extinction which your brother cherished, in a measure owing to his idolatry of that village Venus, ought to be stopped, and when I suggested that Conolly was the only possible marplot, you simply

jumped at the idea. And now because our friend and colleague has got himself into a row in endeavoring to serve you, why, confound it, you round upon us, and want to lecture. It won't do, Mr. Errol Marmyon. The law is strong, but secret societies can beat the law hollow, so let me recommend you to have a care. You don't quite understand the forces at our command, or perhaps you'd funk instead of bullying."

Errol listened attentively to this harangue, which was delivered much in the style of one accustomed habitually to address large audiences, but he was not affected by it. In fact, he laughed low as he rejoined, "I didn't know before to-day that I was an aristocrat. However, apart from that, it seems to me that I have dropped twenty sovereigns."

Mr. Flaymar reddened angrily. "I'll wager you as much again," he said, "that poor Conolly has made the split, and that this precious brother of yours has given the girl the go-by?"

Errol shrugged his shoulders.

"And what's more," continued the other, "you'll have to see Conolly straight through this."

"How so?"

"I mean what I say. We are not thin-skinned in this quarter of the town. This is not Belgravia, neither is it Pall Mall, nor South Kensington, nor Maytair. We've nothing to lose here, or rather the agents we employ have not, so we make it a rule to protect ourselves, and if one of our lot suffers, we exact a penalty from those who are to blame."

"You're a cool hand."

"And you're a dodgy one. The difference between me, the revolutionist, and you the aristocrat, is this: I would be open and above-board if I could; you couldn't if you would. Your nature's sly and secretive, and you're about as ugly a customer to hold as a conger eel. But you don't wriggle out of my grip. We've done your dirty work, partly because it suited us, partly because you made it worth our while. Having done it, we don't intend, I assure you, to be left in the lurch. We shall hold you responsible for our mate, and if any punishment overtakes him we shall track you down and have our revenge."

"Oh!" ejaculated Errol, defiantly, for the wine had rendered him indifferent, if not courageous. "So that's your game. Thank you for telling me. Forewarned is forearmed, Mr. Flaymar, eh?"

"Certainly it is. And therefore, sir, let me advise you to take steps at once—sharp—to get Conolly set free. He's one of the most dangerous men in the country, and if he should be wronged he'll have the whole Central Democratic Leverage Union at his back."

But Errol was, in his own judgment, brought to bay. He therefore quietly lit a cigar, and without vouchsafing a response to Mr. Flaymar, put his hands in his pockets, and strolled leisurely forth into that dark and lonesome gully, styled appropriately Blackpudding Street.

For all his Falstaffian courage he turned to glance over his shoulder ere ever he reached the end of the street. He was not followed, however, and when, after passing down an alley, he gained the main road, he called a cab with the full conviction that

Mr. Hercules Flaymar was nothing better than a vain boaster, given to the employment of empty and wild threats. Indeed, he felt so immensely amused at this interview, as to indulge in a fit of insane laughter to the astonishment of Whitechapel, which registered a verdict that the "swell" must have been on the drink, as indeed in a certain sense he had.

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The morning following dawned upon Polly Williams darkly and gloomily. Father for the first time had come home a little less than sober. Mother was fretful and full of her own ailments. Home, in short, seemed much the reverse of paradise, and life, which a short time ago opened a glorious vista, had become suddenly a burden. She said she should die, and she thought so; but she knew that unless she took the law of destiny into her own hand, and brought the curtain down prematurely on existence, the end would not be yet. Heart-breaking is a slow process. The first news that reached her was that Robert had been spirited away from the Court by his father. The next, that he had left no message for her. Lastly, that rumor had it her swain was going abroad.

Polly, as we know, was young, sweet, tender, and gentle, with the skittishness of maidenhood. Nobody in the village of Marmyon suspected that one so simple possessed any latent force of character. In this estimate of her they were in error. Probably neither Joan of Arc nor Grace Darling in their teens labored under any such suspicion any more than our Polly. History records concerning these maidens of noble quality that they proved themselves far more equal to cope with *la force majeure* than men of herculean strength, and so also this little Kentish girl, when confronted by fate, displayed resolution such as proved her to be indeed sterling.

"Mother," she said, quietly, "I am going to London."

"Going to fiddle-stick's end!" was the maternal response. "Not you, Polly. Don't 'ee talk such rubbidge as that. There's the wash a-waitin' for your pair of 'ands, and you a-settin' in that there cheer a-lookin' like a thunder-storm."

"I mean it, mother."

"And what," with a little cynical, sneering laugh, "does you intend to do in London when you gets there, gal?"

"I don't know, mother."

"No more don't I. So just you stop that there silly nonsense, and get them notions out of your 'ed."

Polly looked at her mother as at a blank wall. If she could have spoken she would have expressed her utter surprise that a woman who had ever been a girl, and had experienced the shock of the wave men call love, a wave that baptizes girlhood for good or ill, could be so utterly callous and unsympathetic to her own daughter. In silence she left the room and in silence returned bonneted and shawled, ready for her departure.

"Don't 'ee be so willful and wicked, Polly," sobbed Mrs. Williams, alarmed at this apparition.

The tears in the mother's eyes being the first symptom of feeling she had evinced attracted Polly, who paused on the threshold, and, strange to relate, smiled.

"I'm not wicked, mother," she said, stooping and kissing the

elder woman, "neither am I willful. It's my last chance, or I wouldn't go to disobey you. If I don't see HIM before he goes away to foreign parts, you may as lief order my coffin. So don't" —appealingly—"try to stop me. I made up my mind as soon as I heard HE was gone without a good-by, and I know I'm right."

But Mrs. Williams not being heroic, felt frightened beyond measure. "What ever will your father say, Polly," she whimpered, "when he hears you've gone? And what be going to do for money?"

Polly took out a little purse—Robert's birthday gift in the old happy days. "There," murmured she, "I've enough, surely. Five shillings, sixpence, four pennies, two farthings, and the new florin HE put in the purse when HE gave it me. But I won't go to spend that; you may bury that along with me, mother."

And she laughed again, quite strangely, for her lovely eyes were sad, and their azure seemed somehow to have changed to a dull gray.

Her mother shivered. "Why," she sobbed, "the railway fare's a matter of three-and-six, return."

"Yes, mother. But it's only two shillings, single."

"But you'll take a return, Polly?"

"No. If I haven't got money enough I can walk home. It's under thirty miles."

And she turned away.

"The girl's gone daft," whined Mrs. Williams. "Here, Mary" —to her next daughter, who was minding baby in the back premises somewhere—"you slip on your bonnet quick and run off to your father to China meadow—he's along with the sheep there this morning—and tell him that our Pol's gone off to the station by herself. Ask him to try and stop her going to London. Quick!"

Having, as she thought, done her possible to prevent her daughter from rushing into mischief, London, to the rustic mind, representing pretty accurately. John Bunyan's "City of Destruction," the good woman sat down to murmur and grunt to herself, being in truth as much chagrined at her own lack of personal influence over her daughter as she was at the thought of the dangers and difficulties to which that guileless young girl was exposing herself by her precipitate action.

She had sat there chewing the cud of bitter disappointment for a long hour and a half, when suddenly the cottage door opened with a crash, and in burst her husband, looking angry and perplexed.

"Where's Pol?" he demanded, savagely.

"Why, gone to London, sure enough."

"Gone to blazes! You've sent I on a fule's errand, wife. Pol wern't at the station, nor hadn't been there; and when the train came in from Maidstone, it went on to London without ever her being inside it."

"Then where is she? She said she were agoing to London, and put on her best things to go in. Whatever has becomed of the gal!"

"Blest if I can tell," retorted Shepherd Williams, angrily. "All I knows is I've been and lost half a day's work through the pair on ye, and all for no good! Darn my old parish if I ever be gulled agin by a passel of women; and as for Pol, if she wants to go to

London, let her go. She have made a bodge of it, she have, and it can't be much wus, nohow."

"Yes it can, Williams," sobbed his wife, "and you know it as well as me. There's wus happens to pore gals than the loss of a lover."

"Be there?" retorted Williams, with unconscious philosophy, as he loafed off to tend his sheep and try and forget about his daughter.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LOVE AND ANTI-LOVE.

A SOFA in a quiet corner of a drawing-room in Curzon Street. It is the afternoon, one of those gray afternoons which seem to forbid exit from home, a London afternoon in short, raw, foggy, dispiriting. On that sofa sat hand-in-hand two people. They are not, needless to add, two men or two women; in fact, the lady we know already as Miss Ida Frankalmoign. The gentleman merits a word of description on his own account.

He is emphatically one of the very latest products of civilization. His hair—to begin at the top of him—is long, amazingly long, and wavy. His forehead lofty and intellectual. His beaming blue eyes large, dreamy, yet by no means devoid of humor. His mouth a little sensual—not very. His profile regular. He does not appear to wear a collar at all—at least if he does it begins somewhere about half-way down his chest, the intent thereof being to display a very feminine throat. He wears a velvet coat of a tint neither quite yellow nor quite brown, and his hands might serve as a model for a sculptor. Such, in brief, is Horace St. Vincent, a gentleman of ancestry, but not of acres; of versatility, but totally devoid of all principles whatsoever; of eccentricity, tempered by a keen eye to the main chance.

"Oh, fair dove; oh, fond dove," warbled he, in a delicious tenor. "Hah! you like that melody. I wrote it one night under the stars. It was not an inspiration; it was an emotion. One of those themes one drags out of one's heart by main force. If I had written then another note—"

"Yes," said she, fascinated not a little by this rhapsodizing, and oblivious of the approaching bathos.

"I should have d—died!"

Ida started. He seemed so solemn, so unlike himself.

"But I didn't," he continued, glibly. "I smoked a cigarette instead. Isn't it an odd thing, Ida, *mia, apropos* of nothing in particular, that I should be going round the world? Round this hideous planet, reflectively."

"You!" cried she, paling visibly. "Why, Horace, what new craze is this?"

"A craze, *pauperina*, called common-sense, worldly wisdom, low cunning, that sort of thing. Come, you know what my complaint it. I'm played out. I'm only twenty-four, that I grant, and not quite a Methuselah; but the last six years, since I left Eton, have been crowded, slightly. I went to Oxford—lived as one does live

there—half mind, half madness—spent my immense patrimony—five thou., all told—spoiled the Egyptians to a similar tune, and—well—there you are!"

"I don't understand," pleaded Miss Ida.

"No? Ha! you never learned logic, cause and effect, antecedent and consequent; all the better for you. Never develop your brain at the expense of your soul. I made it a rule to avoid that fallacy, and they ploughed me in consequence. However, *à nous moutons!* When in this detestable climate a man of my sort owes a lot of despicable ruffians five thou., they have a habit of hustling him, don't you see?"

"Hustling!"

"They lock him up in prison, make him a bankrupt, and exact Nemeses of all sorts. Why, only yesterday a lawyer of my acquaintance, by way of giving a bouquet to the Cliquot, assured me gravely that I was liable to be hauled up before some successful rascal at the Guildhall, who had made money by some disreputable process; and, of course, the fellow who has got it may be relied upon to come down heavily upon the fellow who hasn't. Ergo, I decided that this island is rather too confined and cramped a spot for one of my exalted intuitions, and I'm off at once. That's why I came to-day, and the fates are propitious clearly, for your dear mamma is out, so I can make my adieux comfortably."

Ida bit her lip. "You don't seem much pained at leaving me," she said, or rather drawled.

Now, at this speech your regulation lover would have jumped, fallen on his knees, and uttered the biggest swear of protestation. Not so Horace St. John. He simply strolled to the piano, and began listlessly warbling "Oh, fair dove," as though nobody was in the room.

Suddenly, however, in the midst of a cadenza, he brought down his hands savagely on the keyboard with a couple of discordant chords, twisted sharp round, and said, very quietly:

"It can't be helped, Ida."

"Of course it can't, if you don't wish it," pouted she. "All I can say is that I must have been born under an evil star. My love affairs end—end, before they have begun, almost."

"No, no," he urged, returning to the sofa, "don't say that. I'm not Errol Marmyon—*parbleu*, what a thoroughbred demon that man is. Perhaps you had a lucky escape. Certainly you had."

"Why?"

"I'll finish my story. You've heard about Plantagenet and the plowman, eh? Well, Errol has hit upon a *beau rêve*. The plowman, it seems, is positively his elder brother, and heir to everything. Ridiculous, isn't it? And that old fogy, Sir Robert, didn't know what to do with this singular first-born of his, who has not exactly dropped from the clouds, but rather emerged from the mud. So Errol got hold of a bishop, or some other pundit, and he, the pundit, persuaded Sir Robert that it is his solemn duty to endeavor to manufacture a gentleman out of this uncouth lump of bucolic clay. To effect that he is to be sent the grand tour, and I am the selected bear-leader. Now, is my story quite intelligible? I means as far as I have got."

"Oh yes."

"That, of course, is what our tutor used to call the *premise*. Now for the other thing. If this plowman should not return to his native land, why then, Errol, don't you see, comes in for the entire estate and all the rest of it. So he has requested me as a personal favor to go on a whaling expedition, or to explore the crevices of the Rocky Mountains, or to try the effect of a tiger's teeth upon the rustic hide; anything—so that this amiable plowman may be satisfactorily disposed of in a gentlemanly way. In that event—"

"Horace, you make my blood run cold."

"No, don't. The *beau rêve* is not music, remember, but Errol. As I was saying, in that event he proposes to write a check, and in any case before I return to England, home, and beauty, Sir Robert will arrange to compromise with the Philistines. When they find that I am actually *exeated regno*, they will take half a crown and be thankful. That is an arrangement which will suit me rather better than a matriculation examination at Her Majesty's College of Holloway, or the pleasures of Pentonville, or the mirth of Millbank. What do you think?"

"And you are really going?"

"I am, Ida *mia*—going like the typical bird."

"But you are not going to—to do as Errol asks?"

"That depends—"

"Horace!" drawing back from him, indignantly.

"La! la! la! Oh, fair dove; oh, fond dove."

"Horace!"

"That depends, *carina*, on—"

"On what?" impatiently.

"Simply on you. Suppose I came back in nine months' time with my plowman. Well, I come back a free man, free at least from ticks. So far, so good. But what next? You wouldn't have a man of my ideas *work!* Phew! It's absurd. Of the two evils I'd rather bow myself off this terrestrial scene than descend to what is called bread-winning. Now, when I return, Ida, or thereabouts, you will be able to marry with or without mamma."

"Yes," gasped Miss Ida, "but I must tell you something, a great secret. My mother is not so rich as people think. When my poor father died he left his very large fortune to me, with my mother as sole trustee for us both, she being entitled to—what do you call the concern?—oh, an annuity, that's the term. But mother has been exceedingly silly. She has been speculating and that sort of thing, and—"

"You needn't say any more," smiled Horace, sweetly. "When a woman takes to plunging, eh? Oh, fair dove; oh, fond—"

"Horace, how silly you are!"

"The silliest have their lucid intervals. I hold it still the wisest thing to drive dull care away. Do let us shunt business, *carissima*. It's bad for the complexion."

And he began listlessly toying with her taper fingers in a strange and preoccupied way.

"Am I to say adieu?" she asked, after a prolonged pause.

"Yes, I suppose you must. For the present, that is to say. But

I will write now and then when the fit seizes me. When—when there's any ink about."

"Only now and then?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I think that ink is the greatest mistake out. You dream a lovely love-letter of the loverest type, then you eat your breakfast, and sit down to write it. But the mood is gone, the ink won't flow, and you write stilts instead of love. When we are married, Ida, I will lie in bed and listen to your interpretation."

"Upon my honor!" laughed she, echoing with a sigh, "when we are married."

"Why, why not?"

"Oh, I don't see anything to the contrary, except that there's many a slip, and teacups will get broken, more particularly the pretty ones. You see, Horace, my mother has been very silly, and she wants me to repair the mischief."

"Of course."

"First it was Plantagenet Marmyon. Then there was another repulsion whom I cleared out of my path by the broadest of broad hints. Now it's a venerable absurdity who has had three wives already, and imagines by taking number four that he will cure the gout. He is only seventy, and stone-deaf, so hints are a little bit lost on him. But he's a hundred-thousand-a-year-man."

"You don't surely intend to—"

"Not if I can help it. But you know one can't always control destiny. My name's Ida, not Lachesis."

"Promise me this—that you will consent to nothing before my return."

Ida looked into his eyes. "You are in earnest—for once—Horace," she whispered, half reproachfully.

"I admit the soft impeachment."

"Then I do promise, but I warn you, things may go wrong for all that. Mother says—and she never speaks without cause—that something must happen soon, or else her affairs will come to a serious crisis."

"In plain English, Mrs. Frankalmoign has gambled away your fortune."

"I'm afraid that is the plain truth."

Horace St. Vincent walked to the window nervously, and if his lady-love could have caught the expression of his face, she would have shrunk from him. A moment, however, and his features were composed. Yet another, and there entered, almost as by magic, Mrs. Frankalmoign.

"So, so," said she, in a very determined tone, "I find *you* here, do I? And what right have you, Mr. Horace Vincent, to make love to my daughter behind my back?"

"Eh?" ejaculated Horace, affecting deafness.

"You heard what I said. Answer me."

"Pardon me, my dearest Mrs. Frankalmoign," replied Horace, with his most engaging smile, "but I can not really get you an invitation to Lady McTurk's kettledrum. The cards were all out a fortnight ago. I'm really very sorry."

The lady pursed her lip, and her eyes, that once had been beautiful and soft, glittered angrily.

"I did not allude to Lady McTurk," she said. "You have not answered my question."

"I'm sure I beg pardon. I was inattentive. You refer to that box at the Lyceum? Yes. I can send you that by to-night's post with pleasure."

"Ida," gasped the elder lady, almost speechless with wrath, "tell this man, as he won't hear it from me, what I did say."

Ida gave her mother a look not quite unlike defiance. Then she turned to her lover, held out her hand, and in the most meaningful way whispered, "Good-by."

Horace smiled superbly, returned the pressure of her fingers, and, murmuring low, "Your promise—I rely on it," left the room before Mrs. Frankalmoign had actually exploded.

Two hours later he was seated *tête-à-tête* with Errol Marmyon at a little table in a corner of the Panurge Club. They were discussing savory meats, *tête de veau en tortue*, ortolans, and the rest of the club *menu* for the day, over and above certain delicious vintages, and Horace's plans for the immediate future.

"I shall rely upon the chapter of accidents," laughed Errol, "to play my trump card. You will leave England double-barreled, but you may come back a barrel less."

"Oh, yes," retorted Horace, holding his champagne glass up to the electric light to watch the rosy effervescence. "There are all sorts of risks in traveling, and ignorant bumpkins, you know, like this cub I am to bear—lead, are at times so very reckless. My dearest Errol, what a blessing it is in this world to have made a *tabula rasa* of one's conscience. It's a nasty, awkward, interfering customer, and in the days of my milk-teeth gave me much annoyance."

"That's your sort," cried Errol, enthusiastically. "I felt certain when I put my father on to you that I had spotted the right man. Listen to me, Horace. I've had a talk with our family lawyers, and put the question to them plump: 'Supposing I was actually the heir of Marmyon what sum could you conveniently arrange for?'—down, I mean, and what do you think they said?"

"Fifty thou.?"

"Fifty thou.!" indignantly, "a good deal more than that, my friend. So much that I could write you a check for all that and not miss it."

"The awkward part of it is that I have no sort of security—except your word."

"That's enough, surely?"

"*Altro.* I can't say otherwise. It must be so."

Errol evidently distrusted his friend's dubious tone, for he added with warmth, "Look here, Horace. It isn't only Marmyon and the family honor; it isn't only getting rid of such disgrace as this pig of a creature Hodge—I can't bring myself to think of him as my brother—would involve us in. There's another motive to influence me, and I don't mind telling you—in confidence."

"*Depone tutis auribus,*" smiled Horace, superbly.

"You know Ida Frankalmoign?"

"Rather."

"But you don't know this, that she and I are secretly—mind, Horace, secretly—engaged."

"No, Errol, I did not know that. I congratulate you. Here's a bumper to Miss Ida's health!"

And he pledged him with the most perfect *insouciance*, altogether in the guise of a friend.

"Now," continued Errol, when this pantomime was ended, "you know well enough that I've no chance of that girl, nor she of me, so long as I'm a pauper. She couldn't marry men like you and me, Horace, men without means. That ogre of a mother of hers wouldn't allow it."

"Wouldn't she?" dryly responded Horace.

"Certainly not. The gay widow has pots of coin, and—"

"Indeed!" ejaculated the other.

"Why, of course she has. You must know that. Didn't old Frankalmoign inherit a round million? And isn't it all tied up tight? Why, Hoddy, my boy, where were you raised?"

Horace smiled, as he answered, "We are not all so fly as Errol Marmyon."

"Pshaw!" ejaculated that young gentleman, who was growing impatient at what he regarded as his friend's cussedness, "you must have heard all about it. However, to cut a long story short, I mean marrying Ida. We have had a little sort of—ahem—lover's quarrel, don't you know? but it's of no consequence. Ida loves me, and that's enough. I know her heart, Horace, as thoroughly as I know my own, and I shall come forward and claim it the very moment you wire me that my unfortunate brother has gone dark. With such a stake pending, you may rely on my liberality, not to say eternal gratitude."

Horace beamed across the table another of his too fascinating smiles. "Suppose," he remarked, "that, after all, accidents would not be so very obliging as to happen, and this plowman brother of yours were to regurgitate—eh?"

Errol smiled in turn "That's your waggery, Hoddy," he rejoined, "we won't anticipate anything so truly horrible."

And suppose also that Mrs. Frankalmoign, who is a maneuvering and worldly species of mamma, should marry off the reel your sweet Ida to—ahem—the plowman?"

"You appall me," gasped Errol. "Why then of course I should be beaten all along the line."

"It would be an awkward concatenation of circumstances," observed Horace St. Vincent, sententiously.

"So awkward," remarked Errol, with a nervous twitch of the mouth, "that I would rather dismiss it from my mind. Come, my friend, a thimbleful of curaçoa, and a game of billiards, eh?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"LOVE WILL FIND OUT THE WAY."

THE courteous reader who has followed the thread of this narrative thus far will have perceived that it differs in design from ordinary descriptive dramas. We are not dogging the steps of a hero, nor of a human heroine. We are following instead the destiny of a

huge estate, comprising both real and personal property. The title is merely an embellishment, the pediment that crowns the vast structure—a bit of furniture that one individual supposed to be interested in it deems rather superfluous than not. Our heroine, therefore, is the unearned increment, the tract of land which the labor of long centuries and the creation of so splendid a market for produce as London has centupled in value. It is the fate of the unearned increment on which the sympathetic reader must focus his attention. There is, as now appears more than evident, a scramble to possess our heroine, and in this *melée* there are many ambitious, not so much of possession as of partition. They crave a share of the coffers of the estate, and the bait is sufficiently tempting to overcome every scruple. Thus, while Errol, who is in the line of succession, is over-anxious to enact the part of Cain, if only he may secure the inheritance for himself, others of different and antagonistic views are ready enough to descend to any level, however base, in order to grasp the unhallowed gold. Lembic, the philosophical, and St. Vincent the æsthetic Tory, are as greedy and unscrupulous as Flaymar and Conolly the Communists. Robert alone, who has been taught in the school of the people, and Plantagenet, the man in whose veins flow the people's blood, regard the prize with unflinching eyes, and are little dazed by its glitter. But of these the former as yet hardly realizes its actual value, and the latter has not yet begun to appreciate all he has lost. Circumstances may modify the temper of both, for this heroine of ours, this beautiful increment, is endowed with all the charm of a Delilah, all the fascination of a Circe. For the sake of such, men, ay and women too, have ere now condescended to love loathly things, and to desecrate the ancient sacrament of marriage. More than that, if the Cain of an elder age killed his brother for sheer jealousy, your nineteenth-century Cain will do as much, if only he has the chance of avoiding detection, for cupidity's sake. "Rem" is a young lady blessed with a superfluity of suitors, but it is "Quomodo" who wins her, and laughs to scorn rejected "Honeste," as he leads his prize to the altar to receive the beatitudes of bishops and the adulation of Mammon. In taking "Rem" for a heroine we select the true lady-love of the whole world, the one professional beauty who can dispense with paint.

"Good-morning, my dear son. I hope you slept well. Eh, yes? That's right. Take my advice. Always go to the newest hotel, the newest, mind you, because after four or five years' wear and tear the er—ah—parasites, parasites you understand me, begin to increase and multiply."

"Robert looked a little mystified, the word "parasites" not being in his vocabulary. "Rats?" he ventured to suggest, timidly.

"Er—ah, no. I didn't allude to rats. I—er—ah—referred to a species of parasite that was not individually specified in the plagues of Egypt."

"Fleas, Sir Robert?"

"You don't quite catch my precise meaning, my dear son, and the noun commonly employed to designate these humiliating adjuncts of our imperfect humanity is not one in vogue outside Billingsgate. I may term them, perhaps, the superlative of fleas. But

enough. Suppose we begin breakfast? I asked your traveling companion, Horace St. Vincent, to turn up, but I shall not wait for him. Young men of the present day"—speaking as though his youth had been spent in some epoch antecedent to the Noachian deluge—"of the present day, Robert, despise punctuality, especially in the early morning. Tea or coffee?"

"Coffee's my drink, Sir Robert."

"Er—ah, yes. You'll pardon my saying that we don't allude to anything as a drink. Are you equal to a kidney?"

Robert scratched his head. Then he replied, awkwardly,

"N—no, thank you. Couldn't manage that part of a sheep nohow."

"Er—ah, you surprise me, my son. Ham? Is that in your line?"

"I can eat that," smiled Robert, and fell to accordingly.

"Er—ah," gasped the baronet, nervously. "I—I don't want to be rude, but, really, you terrify me."

Robert looked up from his plate, to which he had been paying very particular attention, to remark an expression of nervous horror on his sire's features.

"It's that knife," protested Sir Robert. "I dare say there's no extraordinary danger in the way you employ it. But if you were to split your mouth open it would be distressing to us both."

"I don't understand," said the young man, flushing.

"There, there," ejaculated the baronet, piteously. "I was afraid I might abrade your susceptibilities, and after all Horace St. Vincent will, with his admirable tact, correct these little idiosyncrasies. Pray go on with your breakfast."

But Robert had deposited his knife and fork and was looking more than half angry. "I'm not fit company for you, Sir Robert," he said.

"Nonsense!" was the firm and prompt rejoinder. "We have not yet come to this, I hope, that a son, in whatever rank of life he may be, is not fit to associate with the father who begat him. No, no, Robert. But don't be quick to take offense. There are a variety of little things you will have to learn, and, believe me, when you have once learned them, you will not be disposed to quarrel with those who took the pains to teach you."

Robert resumed deglutition, but with the air of a proud man who had received an affront. The gilded pill is none the less a bolus to the realistic intelligence of a laboring man.

Fortunately for both father and son the awkwardness of the situation was relieved by the abrupt entrance of Mr. Horace St. Vincent, all sparkle, suavity, and smiles.

"How do you do, Sir Robert? And this is my friend that is to be. Mr. Robert Marmyon, I'm delighted to know you. Ha! *kidneys à la brochette.* Quite!"

And Mr. Horace sat down to his work with the promptitude of a man who means eating.

"So glad," he ejaculated between his half-kidneys—"so glad to be going abroad with a citizen of the world. You believe in equality, Mr. Robert?"

"I'm a Republican," replied the young man.

"That is to say," interposed the baronet, "he thinks he is. Perhaps, after making acquaintance with men and things, he may modify his views."

"That would be a pity," rejoined Horace. "Always swim with the tide. The stream just now is flowing toward that bottomless ocean, Democracy. It will ebb sooner or later, and then the correct form will be Imperialism. Opinions, my dear sir, are so many pawns in the game of life. You play them easily, and lose them with composure."

"But," suggested Sir Robert, "supposing you lost your queen, and your bishops, and your knights?"

"And your baronets, eh? Well, the game will be U P. But you wouldn't have me miss checking my opponent for the sake of a pawn, surely?"

"Then," observed Robert, rather nervously, "you don't believe in nothing whatsomever."

"Just so. You are on the spot, my dear sir, quite. I don't believe in nothing, because I do believe in something. On principle, I believe in number one. This humble individuality, which I call self, is the one point around which all my interest centers, and I'm not unlike the rest of the world, except that I say what I mean, and the others don't."

"You're about right there, sir," assented Robert.

"I'm not so sure," interposed the baronet. "Cynicism is very charming, and as a descendant of cavaliers I'm bound to admire it. But one may go too far. There never was a more thorough cynic than Charles the Second, yet he called in a priest at the last. However, to change the subject. You two young gentlemen contemplate going a-roaming. Now, what are your plans, Horace?"

"Plans! Oh, I never make plans. The one force that propels me is the spur of the moment. Will somebody hazard a suggestion?"

"That's absurd!" muttered Sir Robert, testily. "You can't act in that way. Either you must start *via* Europe, and work round by the Suez Canal or, *vice versa*, cross to New York, and—"

"That's what would suit me," cried Robert, eagerly.

"Then," said Horace, "clearly that is the plan which must commend itself to my intelligence. Let me see"—taking up the "Times"—"the 'King Lud' leaves Liverpool to-morrow. Well, we can run down by train to-night. Nothing easier."

Robert opened his eyes. Rapid action had been, of course, a dream of his. But the notion of packing up your traps and starting for the other side of the world, simply as a happy thought without a moment's premeditation, almost took the breath out of his body.

Horace St. Vincent's promptitude did not, however, affect the baronet similarly. To tell the truth, he was more than relieved at the notion of being spared the society of his son, with whom he had not one single idea in common, and whose habits and instincts were to his refined sensibility most repulsive. He, therefore, did not permit Robert the chance of expressing an opinion, but assumed the plan was settled.

"Very good, Horace. You remind me of Colin Campbell, who, when Pam asked him how soon he could start for India to put down

the Mutiny, replied 'To-day.' But you're quite wise. By traveling in the late winter and spring you will avoid being broiled alive or devoured by mosquitoes. Now for business. Robert here will want an outfit, and as he knows little or nothing of the subject, you had better afford him the benefit of your advice. Will fifty pounds suffice?"

"Make it a hundred," answered Horace St. Vincent, coolly. "I may want a few things myself."

"Ah, yes. Just so. Then I will draw you a check on Coutts, close at hand, and I conclude circular notes will suit you best as traveling money. You two gentlemen will turn up at luncheon—say two o'clock sharp. I will arrange the needful to your mutual satisfaction. *Au revoir* till then. I'm due at the club at eleven."

And so the diplomatic gentleman bowed himself off the scene, leaving Robert not a little bewildered and Horace St. Vincent with a peculiar expression on his handsome features.

As soon as the door closed the latter walked up to him in a quaint, affectionate manner, and said with an impulsiveness that might have been histrionic or sincere, but was well acted anyhow, "Come, Marmyon, let's open the ball by shaking hands. We're going to enjoy ourselves, don't you know? At least that's my notion. Eh?"

"I hope so," responded Robert, gripping the other's rather delicate hand, with what seemed to be five horns.

"That's right. Now to melt this hundred quid. I think the most judicious course will be to go to my tailor—a good fellow, but rather uneven in his temper when you omit to solace him with an adequate check. I owe him just now a small bill, and the sight of coin will cause him sensations of such supreme felicity that he will readily supply us with the necessary goods *ad lib.* Come, my friend."

Whereof nearly all was high Dutch to the unsophisticated intelligence of Robert, or perhaps he might have entered a caveat against this method of handling Sir Robert's money. As it was he failed to perceive that his traveling companion contemplated paying a hundred pounds on account of his private debt, still less that he designed to obtain their outfits on credit, charging both to the account of Sir Robert Marmyon. *Nemo fuit repente turpissimus*, and your simple rustic bred in the bracing atmosphere of field and furrow, never so much as dreams of the depths of dodgery to which impecunious gentility will descend.

Moreover, as it happened, the financial arrangements between Horace St. Vincent and Snip, the Bond Street tailor and usurer, were transacted behind the scenes while Robert was being rigged with sundry misfits; hence, when after the long business of shopping was concluded the pair returned to the Grand Hotel to lunch, one was completely in ignorance of the little business which had been settled so very entirely to the satisfaction of long-suffering Mr. Snip and of the other.

Luncheon was in every way a supreme success. Horace St. Vincent's chatter flowed in a long, constant, and mellifluous stream. Sir Robert had been toned to an equable temperament at his club, and was bland and gracious. The viands and wines appealed strongly to Robert's innate gastronomic sense, and being clad in Snip's rai-

ment he felt, as he looked at his figure in the glass, that in spite of sundry rather damaging cuts on his figure-head he might fairly be taken for a member of the class in which he was born but not bred.

They had concluded their repast, and were enjoying a cigar, when the waiter took Sir Robert aside, and whispered mysteriously that there was a young woman down-stairs wished to see Mr. Robert—whoever he might be.

Sir Robert's brain did not as a rule travel very slowly, but he hardly caught the drift of the man's utterances. He was, indeed, on the point of saying "Show the young woman up," when something flashed like lightning across his brain, and, with a brief, "Excuse me for a minute," he left the young fellows to their weeds and hurried down-stairs after the obsequious Mercury.

Yes. There, tearful, yet *malgré* her obvious distress, the lovely subject whereon were focussed the greedy eyes of two mashers and a venerable ogre, stood in the passage Polly Williams.

"Er—ah," ejaculated Sir Robert, in a tone of ill-concealed irritation as the waiter pointed her out. "Who are you?"

He did not really recognize her. His habit for long years had been to keep as much aloof as possible from his people, so that he was acquainted with their features only by occasionally remarking them at church.

"Polly Williams, Sir Robert."

"Of course. I beg your pardon, my dear girl. And what do you want with me?"

"Nothing, Sir Robert. I didn't go to ask for you."

"Ah, yes. I see. You've followed your love—that is, my son, Robert, here. Is that it?"

"Yes, Sir Robert."

An awkward pause.

"If you will be advised by me you will go home quietly. This is not the place for you, and—and there are reasons why I give you this advice. It is for your good."

The wondrous eyes of the bucolic beauty gazed earnestly at this tricky, plausible man. The look was respectful, for Polly, like all the village, held the liege lord of the place in awe; but it was fearless, and for all the glitter of her tears, determined.

"I can't go, Sir Robert," she pleaded, "without I see HIM!"

"Yes. Well, you can't see Robert at this moment, and whether you see him, or not at all, must depend to a certain extent on himself. You had better wait a few minutes."

"I don't mind what time I wait," answered Polly, "so long as I gets a word with Robert. He don't go to foreign parts without that, if I can help it."

Sir Robert regarded the girl meditatively. Thought he, "She is marvelously pretty. She knows her influence. Half a dozen simple syllables from her lips will change Robert's determination. It must not be." He therefore took her into the reading-room, sat her down in a corner, and gave her a book to read. Then he returned to Robert and Horace.

The former, he soon perceived, had been paying very marked attention to the champagne in his absence, for his features were flushed, and he was laughing loud. Besides which he had aban-

doned his *rôle* of reserve, amounting almost to taciturnity, and was talking excitedly to Horace.

With a gesture to the latter, Sir Robert said, quickly, "Don't fail in your duty of gratitude, young gentlemen, to me. I've arranged for your luggage to be sent direct to Easton; so all you have to do is to take your ease in a hansom. But I am advised that you had better be there in advance of your baggage, so that if you won't think me rude, I shall venture to suggest your immediate departure. Don't you agree with me, Horace?"

"Most decidedly," cried that most acquiescent of toadies; adding to Robert, "Come along, old man. Trains won't wait, you know."

"Where to?" hiccoughed Robert, rising rather unsteadily to his feet. "Going—to—go, stashun?"

"That's it," cried Sir Robert.

"Lesh have 'nother glash of thish stuff, then."

"Bother," muttered the baronet between his teeth, "the fellow's half-seas over already."

However, he helped him to a half-glass, and then by dint of chaff Horace St. Vincent wheedled him out of the room and into a hansom. Sir Robert hastily wished them *bon voyage*, and the maneuver was accomplished with cruel success.

The baronet felt guilty as he returned to Polly Williams. He had tricked and deceived the poor child, and he rather despised himself for it. But *de rigeur* he was not going to allow his conscience to show itself on his face.

"My dear girl," he began, in an undertone, "you must prepare yourself for a disappointment. My son has left for a tour of six or perhaps nine months. Now don't give way, but listen to me. I do not tell you positively he would not, but I do say that he could not see you at the moment of departure. It was impossible. You had had a difference—a break I believe I may call it—and you know best whose fault it was. But I am authorized to assure you of this, and I do so for your comfort, that Robert, while he is angry and disgusted with the conduct you pursued toward that Irish rascal, can not bring himself to give you up altogether."

"Oh, Sir Robert!"

And the poor distressful eyes suddenly sparkled with joy, and the roses returned suddenly to the milk-white cheek.

"Altogether, I repeat: he exacted my solemn promise that during his absence you were to be my particular charge. But he is no longer pledged to you. Understand that. He has now ample time to make up his mind. Your own act and deed caused the rupture, and if it is healed it will be by him. I am perfectly frank with you, as you perceive. Nothing would induce me to buoy you up with false hopes; nothing, on the other hand, to drive you to despair. I cannot tell you that I wish my son to marry your father's daughter, because that would be an untruth. I have higher ambitions for him. But you may rely on this, that if, when he comes home, he resolves to renew his suit to you, I shall offer no obstacle whatever. And now, my dear girl, as I am going back to Marmyon by this evening's train, you will, if you please, accompany me."

"Yes, Sir Robert," sobbed Polly, hysterically, for the latter utterance of the baronet had neutralized somewhat his optimist declara-

tion, "and thank you, Sir Robert. But I do wish as I could have wished him good-by."

"Robert has not said good-by," rejoined the diplomatic baronet, "and it is very far from likely that he will say it after he does come back."

"But," faltered Polly, "perhaps he won't never come back at all."

"Ah," cried Sir Robert, "I never thought of that."

And so these two, the lord of many lands and the simple maiden, went back together to Marmyon—as friends.

CHAPTER XXV.

A RISK NOT COVERED BY INSURANCE.

ROBERT MARMYON sung snatches of rural ditties, notably about "The Barley Mow" and the famous Maidstone "Hog-tub," wherein the lockless lover was immersed, to the strain of "Ill never go theer no moo-oo-oor," till the hansom reached Easton—much to the disgust of Horace St. Vincent, who bundled him quick, not into the hog-tub but into the Liverpool express. In the corner of a first-class apartment this fine young fellow, who had throughout been proof against the fascinations of the Marmyon Arms beer-barrel and gin-bottle, but had succumbed easily to those of Mr. Simkin, dropped into a heavy sleep, and when he actually regained the full possession of his faculties found himself in what at first appeared to be a largish coffin that was, after a moment's reflection, easily recognizable as the berth he was to occupy during his passage across the Atlantic Ocean.

The huge floating city, yclept the "King Lud," was already under way, and the sea beat against her dead-lights with the voluminous thud so strange to the untutored ear of a landsman. He had no recollection of how he came on this shelf, where he had been reposing with his clothes on, for how long he could not surmise; indeed, his head felt so inclined to execute the gyrations of the wings in a musical-box, that he deemed it prudent to lie still and try to sleep. Unluckily, the thought of Polly Williams flashed across his brain, and at that moment, but for his top-heavy cranium and a peculiar sensation of nausea, he would have gone aloft and petitioned to be put on shore. As it was, poor Polly, who was crying her eyes out in her humble bed under the shepherd's roof, had her vendetta. Robert could not sleep, and he lay tossing and burning till daybreak, when, as fate would have it, he dozed off into a leaden slumber.

It must have been at least four hours later when the cheery, though rather satirical, voice of his traveling companion sounded aloud in his ear: "Halloo, my gay friend! going to sleep the whole voyage? Come, you must surely have got over the mops and brooms by now! Why, we've done breakfast half an hour ago. Bless the man, what an object he looks!"

"I've gone and got the yeddache," gasped Robert for once—he was, as a rule, fairly correct in his pronunciation—adopting the Kentish rendering of the most ill-used letter in the English alphabet.

"What's that?" laughed Horace. "Yeddache, did you remark? Well, my friend, the true panacea for all complaints of the 'yedd,' ha, ha! is soap, with a little water added. You'll find both treasures aboard this small craft. And the next best is, if I may suggest, a clean shirt, and a complete change of raiment. There lies your box, and here is the key, of which I have been the careful custodian. After the soap and shirt have been surmounted, breakfast has been known in parallel instances to work wonders. Ha, ha! excuse my brutality. But you do wear such a sublimely ridiculous expression! I have never yet been hanged—that is a pleasure to some—but I should imagine that after the operation I should be fit to play 'Box to your Cox.'"

After which rattle Mr. Horace St. Vincent rushed away incontinently, to return, however, within half a second, and insinuate the perhaps by no means unnecessary caution to one so inexperienced as Robert that it would not be the correct thing to put in an appearance in the saloon until such time as a complete revolution had been effected in his person and appearance, ladies being ubiquitous. The headache had by no means gone; in fact, Robert rather thought it was a degree more torturing to his temples than in the middle of the night. His tongue, too, was cleaving, if not to his gums, certainly to the roof of his mouth; and, indeed and in truth, if only he could have been supplied then and there with a small bucket of tea or soda-water, he would have preferred vastly to lie down and suffer alone. Horace, however, had adopted toward him rather the tone of a leader, if not of a master, and somehow he did not like to rebel at starting. Hence, with a heart as leaden as his head, he washed and dressed to the best of his ability; and, feeling slightly refreshed, emerged from his berth and began to reconnoiter the geography of the ship.

In the saloon, among the crowd of passengers whereof the majority, the ladies not excepted, seemed to have carefully removed all the color from their cheeks and lips, to have substituted in its place the hideous chloride tint of dissolution, and to have fetched up every line and wrinkle they could boast, Robert had no difficulty in espying his traveling companion, who was engaged in very close conversation with a fattish military gentleman. He was about to move slowly in his direction, when across his path flitted a familiar clerical figure. Involuntarily he stopped to stare, in true rustic style, and the stare was returned, critically and inquiringly.

Then the clerical gentleman, whose tall commanding presence attracted general admiration, advanced toward him with, "I think, sir, we must have met before somewhere in the wide world?"

Robert smiled rather gawkily.

"You are Mr. L'Isle," he replied, "and you came to our village to preach for our parson."

"Yes, doubtless. But, my friend, I have been to so many villages in my time, and have preached for so many parsons that your description puzzles rather than enlightens me. My parish is the world."

"Marmyon is our village."

"To be sure. Now, I think I remember. You see, I have an extraordinary memory for faces, and when I preach I do not, like

some men I could name, fix my eyes on the ceiling or the floor. I try to use the power of the eye as well as the magnetism of the tongue, and to watch the precise effect of every word I utter. That will explain my remembrance of your features. You sat in the middle of the church, on the south—that is to say, on the right-hand side facing east—and of all the congregation you were the only one whom I failed to influence. Am I right?"

"Yes, sir, perhaps you are."

"And so it happens that, in the mysterious course of Providence, we meet for the second time. I am going to America to endeavor to found a brotherhood. You, I presume, on business or pleasure. Well, sir, I trust this accidental *rencontre* may be profitable to us both. Don't be alarmed, I'm not going to inflict a sermon upon you, but perhaps you will favor me now and then with a little friendly talk. Kent is my ideal England, and its people I regard as the cream of the English rural population. They are as independent as the northerners, as polite as the west-countrymen, as vivacious as the French, and the shire has produced the two greatest humorists of the century, Charles Dickens and Thomas Ingoldsby."

Robert could but look as he felt, gratified by this handsome tribute to the land of his nativity, but he responded somewhat awkwardly: "Kent's not a bad place to live in, except 'tis for laborers."

Father L'Isle gazed for a second rather curiously on this bronzed specimen of nature's gentleman, whose raiment was that of the lords of creation, but whose accent and manner were not quite in keeping with those gorgeous integuments.

"And your name?" he asked, almost hesitatingly.

"They call me Marmyon, nowadays," was the odd reply to this simple query—"Robert Marmyon."

Father L'Isle's eyes seemed to expand.

"A son of Sir Robert?" he added, in a tone of slight incredulity.

An expression of mystification overspread the good father's face, but he bowed politely as he said.

"You will find me on deck any time before luncheon, Mr. Marmyon, if you happen to be disengaged and disposed for a talk."

Then he moved away, and Robert advanced upon Horace St. Vincent, whose attention has been so closely riveted on the conversation of his military acquaintance that he was unaware of his presence or propinquity.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "here is our young friend. Come, this is an improvement. Clothed and in your right mind, eh? A little coppery perhaps, or rather cobwebby. Hie, skipper—what do you call yourself? Breakfast for this gentlmean—sharp. And a hair of the dog that bit him. Cliquot, Pommery, Moet—any mortal brand. By the bye, I am oblivious of my social obligations. This"—turning to the fattish military man at his side—"this is my friend, Captain Dolopy. And this, Dolopy, is my traveling companion, Robert Marmyon."

"Charmed," observed Dolopy, extending a white hand, which Robert gripped. "Knew your brother intimately. Saw him—when was it? not two days ago. And how do you like sea-sickness, Mr. Marmyon?"

"I baint tried it yet," answered Robert.

"No? Well, then, take my advice. Eat heartily. Don't spare the ship's champagne. It's superb stuff. And you will escape it altogether. *Experto crede!*"

"I baint up to much feeding, this morning," observed Robert, in a solemn and doleful tone.

"Nonsense!" rejoined Horace. "Imagination — that's all. Here"—as the repast appeared—"fall to as a matter of duty, and the effect of deglutition will be to sharpen your appetite."

Everything looked nice and was well served. The motion of the ship seemed tantalizing, perhaps, but Robert soon accustomed himself to it, and indeed executed, circumstances considered, a very respectable fantasia on the knife and fork.

While he was eating, Horace and Dolopy resumed their conversation, which was of a decidedly confidential character.

"You see," said the latter, "the way of it was this: I have been in treaty for a good twelve months with a Yankee prospecter—a certain Judge Potterer, of 'Frisco, though he never was a judge at all; but that don't signify. The title of judge, you see, gives a sort of flavor to a prospectus, and adds at least ninety per cent. to the assay of samples of ore. Well, I was engaged in forming a syndicate to run that other company I told you of, for manufacturing vintage wines at something less than the price of ordinary blacking, when Potterer wired me to come across. That's why I'm here, I may tell you, for Potterer's business is simply A1. He's the very 'cutest cuss of the very 'cutest nation under the sun."

"And what," inquired Horace, "may his business be?"

"Simply this: There is a gold-mine in California which enjoys a certain reputation. When I say it's a gold-mine, I mean it. There is a deposit of gold there over and above the necessary salt. If you invested a large capital and didn't happen to be robbed, you might make a fortune out of it. That, however, is not quite the point. This mine, which consists in all of seven distinct sets, called after the names of the original prospector's seven wives, the Julia, the Mary, the Susannah, the Sarah Jane, the Popsy, the Lizzie, and another, whose name I forget—it don't matter—is the property of Jodge Potterer. Is that good enough?"

"Has he the title-deeds?"

"You anticipate me. He can have the title-deeds—on terms. At present they are in the possession of Mr. Silas Scragson, of Saratoga Springs, the original prospecter. I am told in confidence that there exist in the background several liens upon these documents, amounting—in the round, don't you know—to a little over a hundred thousand dollars."

"How much be a dollar?" inquired Robert, with his mouth full. He had been absorbing the information of Captain Dolopy with quite as positive zest as the viands before him—perhaps with rather more.

"Something under a pound," retorted Horace, impatient at the interruption. "Drive on, Doll, old man. This is dramatic."

"A little over a hundred thousand dollars," continued the promoting captain. "But that's a trifle. In England the people holding a lien of tenpence-halfpenny would collar the title-deeds and throttle the whole concern. They manage things better in the

States. By an arrangement with the creditors of the concern, our friend, Judge Potterer, will enjoy the complete use of the title-deeds, with, of course, liberty to mortgage, sell, or otherwise manipulate. Now, do you see the point?"

"Partially," remarked Horace.

"You naturally ask why they want me over at 'Frisco and Saratoga? Well, the answer is simple. Potterer and I have to square the whole lot of people who have got fingers in the pie. Ready-money, do you say? Nothing of the kind. That emphatically would not be good enough. What we have to negotiate is—division of profits; and, as for the best possible of reasons, they don't confide blindly in the judge, who would diddle the mother that bare him if he had the chance; and as they believe in me, unaccountably, I have to give a guarantee as to an equitable arrangement."

"Here," interposed Horace, "I am getting a little out of my depth."

"Naturally. To explain, then: Suppose we agree on thirds; creditors one-third, the judge another, I another, with a liberal allowance for expenses. In that event, the judge and I return to London sharp, with the legal documents amply certified by the district registry, and all that sort of thing, with a sackful of specimens, and a small volume of assays. Then we shall proceed at once to borrow on the mine, by deposit of title-deeds, every fraction of a cent we can raise. If it can't be done in London it can in Paris, and to avoid the slightest liability we shall put in a vender. I've got an excellent subject—a poor fellow in the last stage of consumption, who wants to leave his wife a trifle to start a shop."

"Splendid!" roared Horace, clapping his hands.

"The next step will be to try and run a company; but that the people who advance the money will have to accomplish single-handed. The public is not as sweet on gold as I could wish. You will perceive, however, that our business—Potterer's and mine—contains all the elements of perfect simplicity. We have to beat the creditors down to the lowest figure. Then we, or rather I, for that part of the affair devolves on me, have to raise the money on behalf of my client, the consumptive vender, and I may tell you that Potterer won't look at a less loan than fifteen thousand pounds. When once we've pouched those pieces the matter may drift. That is my view of the case. I am far from greedy, and five thou.—my third share—will pay me well for less than three months' work, and will also enable me to run successfully the biggest thing I have in the office—the manufacture of vintage wines at a price, sir, to defy competition."

"It seems to me," said Robert, quietly laying down his knife and fork, "that somebody's going to lose his money."

"Such is my desire," responded Captain Dolopy.

"That bain't right," retorted Robert, looking straight into the shifty eyes of the promoter.

"If you mean," said Horace, "that money-making is in principle wrong, I am with you; but if your idea is that this is an exceptional case, and that, whereas money-manufacture in the abstract is ennobling, this is the reverse, I must tell you that you are out in your calculation. The operation my friend here contemplates is one

which rests upon the secure basis of the ancient ethical principle of commerce, crystallized in the formula, *Caveat emptor*—in plain English, that the man who parts must look out for himself."

"Besides which, added Dolopy, "it will never do to lose sight of this one grand truth, that what is one man's gain is another man's loss. You can't both win your stakes. After all, the great millionaires—the Mackays, Jay Goulds, and Vanderbilts of the States, or the Rothschilds of the Old World—enjoy the sweets of life at the expense of the misery of millions. It's the same all round. You like sweetbreads, eh? So do I. Consequently we hire a cad to go and rob a poor calf of his life—a life as capable of rational enjoyment as our own; the cad butchers the calf with the maximum of suffering that diabolical ingenuity can inflict, and then we sit down and gloat over a fractional part of the calf's corpse. Is that your notion of justice? because if it is it's not mine. Fact is, there's no such thing as justice. The only national philosophy is for every one to take care of himself—in money matters, at all events."

Robert shook his head. This novel system of ethics did not by any means square with his preconceived ideas. It was not the philosophy of Flesset Wood.

"My good sir," continued Captain Dolopy, almost petulantly, "your views of life appear to me to be most crude and primitive. Look at your own case. You, so our mutual friend Horace St. Vincent informs me, are the son and heir of my dearest friend, Sir Robert Marmyon, as fine a gentleman as ever walked in shoe-leather. Good. In the future, if you survive your father, you will live like a fighting-cock, on what? On the daily sweat of a small colony of your fellow-creatures. Nay, more; you are at the present moment eating the food they provide. Who pays for the admirable bottle of champagne we are enjoying—another glass, Horace, if you love me—who but Sir Robert Marmyon? And who pays Sir Robert Marmyon? Why, those wretched drudges who plough and sow, and do all that kind of thing. Every drop I swallow represents so much hard labor. And so, my dear sir, as you spoil the Egyptians, you can't grumble at me if I do the same. Your method, or rather your father's, is old-fashioned, yet essentially cruel. Mine represents the special intelligence of the latter half of the nineteenth century, and is merciful. The children of Israel, who will probably part on the security of Potterer's title-deeds, are so wealthy that they will not feel the drop of fifteen thou., or, for the matter of that, ten times that sum; whereas your poor Kentish serfs would be made gloriously happy by the addition of the heavy percentage you strike off the aggregate result of their labor. See?"

"Yes," answered Robert, rather bitterly, "I do see. I see that I am a traitor to the belief that is in me."

"Good gracious!" laughed Horace; "what sentimentality is this? Really, really, this must be the precursor of *mal-de-mer*."

"What's that?" inquired Robert, half testily.

"Nothing, nothing," laughed Dolopy. "Let me offer you a cigar, and you can then, having metaphorically swallowed ever so much Kentish labor in that bottle of fizz, enjoy the condensed toil and anguish of the negroes of Havana. It's a very good one, I assure you, and doubtless cost those cousins of the missing link no

end of trouble, while the profit, I dare swear, went to the ruffian who imported it. *Homo, homini, lupus*—which I may interpret as, 'We are all cannibals.' For myself I should relish a larger slice of human flesh than I have as yet been able to grab."

"But," retorted Robert, accepting the proffered cigar, "how would you like to be eaten?"

"Not much. And what's more, I don't intend to be, so long as I've a tooth in my head to bite another duffer with."

The conversation taking a rather personal tone, Horace suggested a move, so they went on deck. Pacing the length thereof, his white locks floating in the breeze, strode Father L'Isle. He at once took possession of Robert, and thus Dolopy and Horace St. Vincent were left once more to a congenial *tête-à-tête*.

"That's an average cub of yours," sneered the former.

"A cad," replied the other, airily, "yet, by a strange paradox, a cad with the best blood of England in his veins. He is rather a trial, not one spark of *esprit* or chaff in him. A serious, glumptious, Balptist Chapel young man, veneered over with all sorts of cut-and-dried principles. If he'd got any vices I should not despair of him; but he hasn't such a thing about him, though he takes his tipple kindly, I remark, and may develop the sort of sottishness cads affect. It pays me to act as his nurse, but he's not precisely a credit to go about with, and in fact the earlier he beats a retreat the better it will suit my book."

"How so? *Beats a retreat?*"

"Well," in a half-whisper, "it's not *necessary*, you know, that a cad of that sort should regurgitate at Marmyon Court, and play old gooseberry with the family honor. As a cousin of Lady Marmyon, I should be glad if she could be spared that disgrace. It would be quite too-too!"

"Yes?"

"And in fact—between you and me—if he didn't happen to put in an unwelcome reappearance, don't you know, Errol would be prepared to do the entire handsome trick by yours truly."

"Ha! a stroke of genius quite. Now, my boy, I begin to quaff the milk of the cocoanut. To what sort of tune does Errol propose to play?"

Horace looked round over his shoulder. They were alone, entirely beyond ear-shot of everybody."

"Fifty thou."

Captain Dolopy cast a meaningful glance at his friend. Then he said, in a low tone, "Yes, that's good enough—good enough for two, Horace."

"Eh?"

An affectionate hand lighted on Horace's shoulder, and a voice whispered, "Halves."

"If you'll manage the trick, yes, Dolopy."

"Right. But hush! here is the cad."

He was but just in time to close the open lips of Horace, for arm-in-arm with Father L'Isle Robert passed, listening attentively to the quiet, earnest utterance of the servant of a better kingdom than that of Mammon.

A fragment of Father L'Isle's words fell unwittingly upon the ear of either. It was this:

"But you know you might die. You are young and strong, yet neither youth nor strength affords an insurance against early death."

Dolopy looked at Horace, Horace at Dolopy. It was the look of sympathy in sin that only the case-hardened can communicate from eye to eye. Neither spoke; but they shook hands, and the diabolical pact was struck and ratified in the very teeth of the warning of the man of God.

"That parson," murmured Horace, in a low tone, as the forms of the father and Robert Marmyon dwindled in the distance of the long deck—"that parson for once was on the spot."

"An inspired prophet," laughed Dolopy. "If only I could retain the services of that elderly gentleman for the day before settling day!"

"Or for the eve of the Derby?" suggested Horace. Then they both laughed, as, with their mental vision, they measured the heir of unearned increment for his coffin, and priced him much as a butcher might a prize ox at a cattle show.

"It's a dangerous thing," remarked Horace, after a pause, filled up with the puffs of their cigars, "to be the heir of a large reversionary interest."

"Yes," replied Dolopy, "we can't be too thankful that we have been mercifully spared any such extraordinary risk. You, I imagine, Horace, are neither a Crœsus in the present nor in prospect."

"My stock-in-trade is bills—unpaid bills."

"Quite so. And mine, bills of exchange, more or less negotiable, together with a large and varied selection of shares, not, I am glad to say, registered in my name, and of no particular market value—miscellaneous, in fact, very. We are about on a par it strikes me."

"Clearly, therefore," rejoined Horace, "it is a duty incumbent on both of us to avail ourselves of every opportunity of creating a balance at our bankers'. I always do my duty when I can."

"So, Hoddy, my boy, does this child. But I fancy it may be advisable to postpone any immediate performance of the duty we owe to ourselves until we arrive at 'Frisco. That sweet spot is a bourne from which all travelers do not return."

"I know nothing. Bear in mind I know nothing," reiterated Horace, nervously.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"OPEN SESAME."

WHILE the fate of the broad acres of Marmyon was thus trembling in the balance, the man who for over twenty-two years had been regarded as heir to them under strict entail, was vegetating alone, unfriended and solitary, in a small lodging at Brixton. He had selected that quarter of the town for his domicile because it offered a safe retreat from his quondam associates; but the surroundings jarred upon his sensibilities which, though naturally tough enough, had been trained to refinement. He had been accustomed through life to the rarest luxuries—above all to that perfect

cleanliness and order which constitute the charm of a mansion like Marmyon Court. The change to rather stuffy rooms, the service of an unclean Abigail, dirty furniture, dirtier linen, the odors of the kitchen, and the inquietude of an overcrowded house, were painful in the extreme; moreover, he lived a solitary life entirely, for he was at once too proud to make fresh acquaintances in his new sphere, and to revive those of the old one. The poor man brooded and suffered. He was still alike weak and thin, after the terrible fever which had brought him within an ace of death, and his arm remained in a sling, while his visage still bore traces of the punishment it had received; and though the scars had healed, he presented rather the appearance of a veteran of the prize-ring.

It was about a month after Robert departed for America, when Mr. Blaydon, solicitor and factotum, received a call from this poor gentleman. Mr. Blaydon belongs to the variety of lawyers whose connection lies chiefly among the junior members of the aristocracy. He is a dealer in reversions, and has obtained a favorable reputation as being accommodating and facile, without being more than usurious. In the old days, he had made without question an advance *sub rosa* to the supposed heir of Sir Robert Marmyon, taking by way of security no more than his autograph on stamped paper.

"Well, Mr. Plantagenet Marmyon, and how is Mr. Plantagenet Marmyon!" was his dry greeting. He spoke in the sort of tone that might mean a sneer or a welcome, as you chose to interpret it.

"My name," answered Plantagenet, reddening, "is Hodge. Oblige me, Mr. Blaydon, by recollecting that. It is a poor compliment to address the man who has cast off the lion's skin as though he were really a lion."

"Yes," said the lawyer, casting down and focussing, as it were, on the pattern of the carpet a pair of cold gray eyes that harmonized perfectly with a very bloodless complexion. "But what about my advances to—not Mr. Hodge, but Mr. Marmyon? Principal and interest, they amount, all told, to something in excess of three thousand pounds. You, my dear sir, may, if you are so disposed, abandon your reversionary interest in Marmyon without a struggle. I cannot afford to give my consent to any such act of quixotic insanity. You came into my office. You asked me to advance you money on an alleged reversion. I did so. And now you tell me that the story about the reversion was all a mistake, and you expect me to lose my money with resignation. Won't do, Mr. Plantagenet!"

Thus addressed, the big, dejected man raised his fine hazel eyes, wherein sparkled just a little of the old fire and force. "Quite so," he replied, "and your claim was one reason of my call to-day."

The lawyer perked up and looked astonished.

"My position, as you are aware," continued Plantagenet, "is delicate, peculiar, embarrassing. I wish for your advice, if you will favor me so far?"

Mr. Blaydon bowed.

"As far as I am concerned, under no circumstances, not even to meet my liabilities, will I stoop to the unutterable baseness of contesting the rights of the man whom I have supplanted, who is the real heir. You shake your head, Mr. Blaydon. Wait, however, till you hear me out. I repeat, I could not obtain the inheritance if I

were to claim it, and I would not if I could. That's my final decision. But it happens, though you may not be aware of it, that I owe my utter prostration through typhoid—perhaps the total wreckage of a naturally strong constitution—to the rascal whose reputed brother I once was, Errol Marmyon. I cannot work for my living to-day as I could wish. I may not be able to work for six months or more—perhaps never. I have, therefore, I assume, a right of action against this man who would have ended my days in order to gain what was my inheritance, and also the girl I love. I ought to say that we both love. But I am unwilling to commence legal proceedings of such a character as would gibbet Mr. Errol's rascality, and bring eternal disgrace on the name of Marmyon. I cannot endure the thought of injuring Sir Robert. With him I have no quarrel. How must I act?"

"You can leave it to me," said the lawyer.

"Certainly, provided that you explain fully the line you intend to adopt."

"You had *better* leave it to me," responded the lawyer, doggedly.

"For what reason should I instruct you to blindfold me?"

"For your own sake, sir. Don't you know that a man who is his own lawyer has a fool for his client? You want me to advise, yet to be able to reject my advice. That won't suit me."

"Nothing of the kind. I only ask that you should not in my name take any step at variance with what I consider to be the right and honorable course."

But Mr. Blaydon would not acquiesce, so Plantagenet at once rose to leave.

"You had better give me your address," said the lawyer; and accordingly the other wrote it down. Then he turned to go.

Mr. Blaydon, however, did not intend him to retire quite so easily. As a parting shot, therefore, he cried, "Have you any proposition to make me?"

"Proposition!" echoed Plantagenet.

"Yes, of course, proposition for liquidating the large sum you owe me."

"None."

Then Plantagenet, pale and proud, strode forth, murmuring to himself objurgations on the unwisdom he imagined himself to have evinced in having intruded upon a lawyer of that type. He was like many another honest gentleman, painfully disillusioned. The polished blood-sucker who hitherto in the days of his prosperity had lick-spittled him, and indeed had run to meet his every wish more than half-way, appeared now in his true colors, false as Erebus, cool, calculating, and cruel, and as ready to crush as to fawn. He had not, it is true, said very much, his reticence contrasting strangely with his normal volubility. But his manner was unmistakable. It was indicative of hostility, not to say malice. Shylock had dropped his ducats, and was ripe to recover them by an expedient, however blackguardly and indecent.

But his disillusionment was as yet by no means complete. A gentleman living in the free atmosphere of field-sports, good fellowship and honor bright as the daylight of midsummer, never suspects, and certainly cannot realize, the unutterable baseness of the money-

making classes. The gentleman and the working-man occupy the same platform of integrity; and though the former when he happens to be a landowner, is apt to utilize the leverage he holds to wring far more than his fair share out of the land, still he is almost invariably as far remote from chicanery, larceny, usury, and wholesale plunder as the laborer himself.

That evening, while he was reading a novel adapted to his small intelligence, one of the sporting sort, with a foxhound for a hero, the filthy Abigail snuffled out something anent a gentleman who wished for an interview.

Plantagenet flung down his book and his pipe, and awaited the stranger.

"Which, sir, my name's Jubber. Pr'aps you don't call to mind my features. I've seen you before a many times."

Plantagenet surveyed him critically. He was an ancient, a nervous, and a seedy sort of specimen. His nose was red, his eye was watery, his hand tremulous, while, to impart a Georgian dignity, he wore round his neck a choker of the Regency period that covered the acre of humanity lying between the ear and the collar-bone. His was one of those too sympathetic souls that craves to kiss everybody's boots, only the Georgian stock placed an embargo on this very humiliating ambition.

"I don't know, sir," said Plantagenet. "Yes, I've seen you somewhere. Ah, I remember: at Mr. Blaydon's. You're one of his clerks. Well, what do you want?"

A tear welled in that watery eye, and the voice shook with the husky emotion suggestive of Geneva or Glencoe, as it replied, "I've ventured to call, sir, as a friend. It ain't my business, and that I am free to confess, but it goes to my 'eart, sir, to think of the pitfall as—"

"Pitfall! What nonsense is this, man? Speak, will you?"

For the excess of emotion had caused the gentleman with the lachrymatory glands to pull up sharp as he approached the point, gurgle and chuck his chin, and finally take refuge in a large and dusky flag of the hue designed to disguise brown rappee.

"The pi—pitfall," gurgled the voice, with another epileptic chuck of the chin, "has been laid by the reptile, sir. Yes, the reptile who calls himself my master!"

"Eh? What? Old Blaydon?"

"Blaydon, sir, is his name, and Blaydon, sir,"—with an idiotic emphasis—"is his natur'. If you takes, sir, the epithecks 'bleeding of 'em to death,' and 'flaying of 'em alive,' and roll them into one word, you have, sir, the word Blaydon. Blaydon, Mr. Marmyon."

"My name's not Marmyon."

"Beg pardon. The docyment's made out in the name of Marmyon, *alias* Hodge, but that don't signify. It 'tain't the Marmyon, it 'tain't the Hodge, as the law wants. It's the individual meant. That's it, sir; and if I was to serve you with a summons by one name or t'other you'd have to appear."

"What the dickens, old man, does all this palaver have to do with me? Nobody's going to serve me with a summons. I'm a pauper, but not just yet a criminal."

"Are you quite so sure of all that, sir?"

"Confound your impudence," roared Plantagenet, "you don't suppose I'm going to stand this kind of impudence from Blaydon or you or any other man. Clear out of my rooms, will you, or—"

"Come, come, you need not be so sharp!" retorted he of the choker, his eyes suddenly losing their feeble fondness and assuming a disgusted expression. "I tell you, I've come all the way out to Brixton, living as I do when at home in the neighborhood of the Seven Sisters, to give you the tip. I says to myself, I says, as you left our office to-day, now what a cruel shame it is as that pore gentleman don't know more than a baby what's in store for him. Shall I, says I to myself, give him the chance of saving his skin?"

"And your conscience answered in the affirmative. All right, drive on, and say straight what's in the wind."

But it was not in the nature of an old lawyer's clerk either to drive on or to say straight. Before commencing at all he had to chuck his chin at right angles to his face, then draw it back and insert it behind his buckram stock, to cough and grimace, and apply the flag to his nose. These preliminaries settled he did come to the point, startlingly.

"Blaydon's instructed me to go down to the city and take out a summons against you for obtaining money under false pretenses."

Plantagenet looked at the man steadfastly. The watery eye did not flinch. This was truth.

"If you doubt me," continued Mr. Jubber, "here is the paper," extracting a roll from his pocket; "you can satisfy your curiosity if you please."

"Thanks, no. It's unnecessary, quite."

"If," proceeded Mr. Jubber, "as one who has spent a lifetime in the law, I might be so bold as to advise, I should say make a clean breast of it to Sir Robert Marmyon."

The big man colored slightly, stretched his limbs, fixed his attention on the fire, but did not answer.

"You see, sir," added Mr. Jubber, "an affair of this sort would affect Sir Robert as much as you, and he wouldn't care to have his name paraded in the police reports."

"Quite so!" cried Plantagenet, his slow intelligence gaining suddenly a glimpse of daylight. "Quite so! You're right there. Yes, Sir Robert ought to know."

"Which," remarked Mr. Jubber, rising abruptly, "I wish you a good-night, Mr. Marm—Mr. Hodge."

Plantagenet rather winced at the cognomen Hodge.

It was just a little too much for his stomach at this crisis, albeit he steadfastly refused to be styled Marmyon. Mr. Jubber perceived the thrill of pain, and remarked, as he retired toward the door, "'Tain't my business, but if I was in your shoes, sir, I'd be Marmyon and nothing else till I was stopped by Act of Parliament."

Plantagenet smiled sadly, shook his head, and replied, "No, I can't accept that advice, but I will see Sir Robert without delay, and —and—I'm much obliged to you for forewarning me."

Mr. Jubber, his hand on the door, cast one critical and inquiring glance, the meaning whereof was utterly lost upon Plantagenet's density. Then he closed the door after him with a brief "Good-evening." And as he emerged into the street Miss Abigail over-

heard him mutter, savagely, "My—ain't he mean neither? Might have stood a drink, or half-crown for a cab, or a bob for the 'bus! That's what comes of doing business with shady swells. It don't pay. Never yet knowed a fellow out at elbows to have a spark of gratitude. However, I've done as Mr. Blaydon ordered, and no doubt the baronet will stump up."

On the morrow, Plantagenet, having previously dispatched a wire to notify his advent on important business, took the earliest feasible train to Marmyon, strolled leisurely from the station, every familiar spot causing him mental pain. He avoided the recognition of the villagers as far as possible. The majority salaamed in the old fashion, but one or two stared him full in the face, and one added to that rudeness the brutality of bursting into a fit of laughter. It was an ordeal he felt keenly, for he had been studiously nurtured in the pride of birth and family, and his hideously false position would have tortured a man of even coarser fiber than his.

As he passed the Marmyon Arms, a biggish fellow, of rather rowdy appearance, addressed him.

"The top of the mornin', sorr! Could ye tell a gintleman the toime, sure? Oi've had the misfortin' to pawn me gould repayther in consequince of havin' bin sint for a month to the thread-mill at Maidstone for hammerin', sure, that spalpeen, the felly that calls himself Sir Robert Marmyon's son. Oi thank ye, sorr," as Plantagenet referred to his watch; "and, bedad, if oi'm not mistook intoirely, it's the t'other one as was turruned out that I have the honor of adthressin'."

Plantagenet, casting upon Mr. Mike Conolly—whose brogue may at once be recognized—a sort of blank, indifferent glance, remarked casually, "Yes, I'm the man," and moved away as one in a dream.

"Thin, bejabers, if ye're goin' up there to the Coort, sure, ye may tell the ould divil, the bar'net, sure, that Moike Conolly will be ayvin wid him, plaze the pigs, befoor he's done! Say that, will ye, me dear sorr, and oi'll do the same for you another toime."

But although Mr. Mike shouted this message aloud after Plantagenet, his words fell on deaf ears. There was cause enough for the man of broken hopes to concentrate his thoughts on the business before him, for he would rather have plucked out his right eye than have sought this interview with Sir Robert. He had passed through bitter experiences. This seemed to him the bitterest, the most humiliating, of all.

Slowly, painfully, and with an effort to suppress the sob that seemed ever rising in his chest, he wended his way to the Court. Never had the place, albeit it was the dreary, early spring of England, looked so magnificent, so lordly. The giant elms, the towering gables, the very chime of the clock-tower, all seemed to sound in his ear, "See what you have lost;" and the grand belt of wood above them, with its myriad whispering branches, to re-echo that taunt. He could have esteemed death at that moment, for he realized now the immense chasm between the grandeur of his old home and the squalor of that cramped and squalid life in Brixton. What was there to live for now? Honor—the pomp of pride and power—that was gone forever. His love was dead. If he had had a pistol

in his hand he would there and then have lain a corpse at the gate of the earthly paradise he had lost.

There was no such alternative, and the bitter cup had to be drained to the dregs. Summoning, therefore, all his small stock of moral courage to his aid, he walked to the portal and rang the bell.

He had expected, naturally, to be admitted by one of the flunkies, and this might have been so had not his wire premonished the one virulent enemy he had in the world. As it was, the old black oak door-way swung on its hinges, and there stood before him, to bar his entrance, the man whom once he had tried to love as a brother, the companion of his childhood, his boyhood, and his young manhood, Errol Marmyon.

"What do you want here?"

Plantagenet's blood rushed to his temples, but he made no answer to this brutally direct query.

"What do you want here, I repeat, Hodge?"

This was more than Plantagenet could bear. His chest heaved, his nostrils dilated, as with a supreme effort he responded, "Sir Robert Marmyon."

"That is no answer. You must state your business."

"Are you acting by your father's instructions in refusing me admittance?"

"I decline to be cross-questioned. Be good enough, Hodge, to state the purport of your visit."

Plantagenet looked as though the object of his morning call was to fell the speaker with his one available fist. But he replied with a calmness of tone that was a contradiction to the fire in his eyes.

"I shall be glad to explain the cause—the causes, I should say—of my intrusion to Sir Robert Marmyon. They are for his private ear."

"Indeed. Then I am instructed to inform you, Hodge, that you may at your leisure communicate with Sir Robert Marmyon's solicitors."

"Do I understand that Sir Robert declines to see me?"

"You may understand that before you can be allowed to cross the threshold of this house you must first explain the nature of your business—for I presume you would not have the effrontery to intrude here except on business—to me."

Plantagenet paused, passed his hand over his forehead and reflected, while Errol slowly but positively began to shut the door in his face.

"Stop!" said Plantagenet at length, placing his strong hand on the handle. "You demand the nature of my business. It is twofold. I will mention the first item only—to demand satisfaction from Mr. Errol Marmyon for having, with the aid of Professor Lembic, of Oxford, conspired to procure my death by typhoid poison."

The huge, heavy door yielded to his gentle pressure, and in a trice swung back with a dull thud upon its hinges. He had uttered the "Open Sesame!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A FATALITY.

"PERHAPS, as you descended upon us to threaten," sneered Errol, "you had better hurl your lightning at my father's head. Be good enough to follow me. He is in the library." And he turned his back and strode away.

Plantagenet in silence followed him accordingly to the familiar room, Sir Robert's sanctum.

"Mr. Hodge," cried Errol, flinging open the door and entering.

The sire and his son were of an opposite temperament; for whereas the latter had treated his quondam brother with the grossest contumely, the latter ran to meet him with outstretched hands and beaming smile. "My dear Planny, so glad to see you! This is indeed a pleasure. And where have you been all this time?"

The mournful eye of the big fellow as he grasped the baronet's hand told more than half its tale, but Errol stood by with a smile of sneering sarcasm on his face, and ere ever Plantagenet could respond, cut in with "You need not be in such a hurry to welcome Mr. Hodge, father. He is not here as a friend!"

"What!" gasped Sir Robert, bridling confusedly.

"Perhaps when I state the reasons for my intrusion you will be better able to judge whether I come as a friend or as an enemy," rejoined Plantagenet.

"Certainly, certainly," urged the baronet. "Pray, Errol, do not anticipate."

"I am not in the habit of doing anything of the kind," snapped that young gentleman; "but Mr. Hodge has already condescended to reveal the purport of his visit."

"That is the case," observed Plantagenet, quietly. "I was challenged to speak, and if I had held my tongue I should have been denied admittance to this house."

Sir Robert cast a suspicious look at Errol, then he remarked, quietly, "You two men never could agree, and it's not likely that matters will mend between you at this time of the day. Errol, oblige me by retiring. I conclude, Planny, your confidence is for my ear alone."

"That man," said Plantagenet, as Errol closed the door, "is implacable. He has left me a wreck. I am as weak as water, and more broken in health than in fortune. The enmity he speaks of is this—that I consider myself entitled to compensation from him for all I am suffering, and to the physical inability I labor under of earning my bread."

"Yes," answered Sir Robert, "that is true, Errol is your debtor, indisputably."

"I might," continued the other, "avenge myself on him. I might cover with eternal disgrace the wretch who did his utmost to send me out of the world, and has to-day added insult to injury. But I hesitate. He is your son, and you have been, Sir Robert, owing

to the net-work of circumstances, my good friend. I could not strike at him without wounding you, and that would be a course most abhorrent to me."

Sir Robert listened attentively, then he asked, "Is that the gist of what you wish to say, Planny?"

"No. I am sorry to say not all. I gave some post-obits in the days when I imagined myself to be your son, and, it appears, have laid myself open to an action for fraud, which, indeed, is imminent, and which I can not defend except under the *alias* Marmyon."

"And that is the sum and substance of your communication to me this morning?"

Plantagenet bowed, rather stiffly perhaps.

"Did you employ a threat to Errol?"

"I told him I had come to demand compensation. So I have. It is due to me."

Sir Robert bit his lip. "Can you trust me, Planny?" he inquired, with the air of a man who had made up his mind conclusively, if hurriedly.

"Most emphatically, yes."

"Then give me the name of the man who holds your post-obit bonds."

Plantagenet wrote down Mr. Blaydon's name and address, adding that a summons had been already taken out, and that it might be served at any moment. Hence his visit.

Sir Robert took note of this, flung down his pen, wheeled round his chair to the fire, and remarked, cheerily, "Well, if that's all the business of the day, Planny, suppose we have a quiet chat?"

"With pleasure," replied the young man, "provided I have your assurance that these two subjects on which I have ventured to intrude shall have your and Errol's immediate consideration."

"I have said so," answered the baronet, "and both, I pledge you, shall be settled, I hope—er—ah—to your entire satisfaction. But don't talk, if you please, about intrusion. This is your home, remember—as it always was. And I am—er—ah—your foster-father, you my adopted son."

Plantagenet's voice trembled exceedingly as he replied, "I was afraid of this. I was afraid you would overwhelm me with favors. No. I adhere to my conviction that I can not make this my home. My presence would hardly be acceptable to Lady Marmyon, while to your son Errol it would be detestable. In his eyes I am Hodge, and he in mine—pardon the simile—is Cain."

Sir Robert held up his hands in deprecation, but something must have distracted his attention, for he turned his head quickly over his shoulder. There was, in fact, a perceptible rustle of some sort of silk or cloth, and in a trice Lady Marmyon entered, and paused abruptly, elevating her superb eyebrows by no means with an expression of extreme gratification at the spectacle of her cast-off and apocryphal son.

"Oh," said she, directing a glance at Plantagenet, "so you are here? And how do you do? I hope you are better than you were."

Language can not indicate adequately the cool, cutting indifference of this speech. She did not call him Hodge, but her tone no less than her set commonplaces were intended to convey the notion that

he was Hodge, and between himself and her ladyship was a boundless gulf.

But her husband did not like this one little bit. "Poor fellow," he replied, decisively, before Plantagenet, who had risen, but didn't offer his hand, Lady Marmyon having made no such motion toward him, "he is still on the sick-list. I want him to stop here and recruit."

Lady Marmyon flushed and bit her lip. "I thought," she answered, again addressing Plantagenet, "that you had something to do—some employment of some sort which tied you to London?"

Again Plantagenet was about to utter, but again Sir Robert anticipated him with "Certainly not. Nothing of the kind. Planny is unfit for work, and for play too, I much fear. He wants change sadly, and there is no such restoration as one's native air. What do you say, Planny?"

Plantagenet gazed with quiet dignity at the woman he had kissed as mother, tried to love as mother, and obeyed as mother. The look was sorrowful rather than angry, and a forced smile curled round his lips as he said, firmly, "I return to town by the next train."

Then my lady caught just a glimpse of her lord's features, which exhibited every sign of chagrin if not of anger, and it was perhaps the dislike of the impending storm that caused her to add, "But you will surely stop to luncheon? Your old friends, Mrs. and Ida Frankalmoign, are on a visit to Lord Sevenoaks and we expect the whole party over in about an hour."

"Thank you—thank your ladyship, I mean—I *must* return to London."

"But," Sir Robert again interposed, "I think, my dear, you have made a mistake in the day. The Frankalmoigns are not due to luncheon until to-morrow. You had better change your mind, Planny. Do so to oblige me."

"I would do a good deal to oblige Sir Robert Marmyon, if it lay in my power, but not that."

"As you will," rejoined the baronet, piqued at what he regarded as obstinate pride.

"Then," smiled my lady, who had got her own way in spite of her husband, "I must say good-by," and she offered Plantagenet the tips of two fingers.

"And I too," rejoined Plantagenet, turning to Sir Robert, and adding, as Lady Marmyon retired, with for him rapid emphasis, "believe me, my one desire is to do the right thing."

"Yes, yes," was the half-petulant rejoinder, "only it happens that you do the very reverse. However, that is your affair, not mine. You persist in terming yours a false position. There is nothing false about it, except what you choose to make false. You are not my son, but I have every right to adopt you as such, if you choose to be adopted. It is you who insist on effacement, not—"

Plantagenet laughed bitterly, "Yes, I, and Mr. Errol Marmyon, and every member of the family, except the head. No; that can not be. I must work in some capacity or other, when I am well enough, if ever I should be fit for any sort of exertion."

And so with the last word on his lips, he left a card with his Brixton address, and walked away from his old home, dejected and crushed.

At the lodge gates he found himself waylaid—by his mother. Martha's face to him beamed more luminously than ever; and her presence, which in the days of his grandeur he had been able to tolerate, was now positively repulsive.

"My bo-oy," she whined, "when I reflects on the wrong done you by my h'idotic confession I could a'most go and drownd myself. If I hadn't been mad with that there Errol, and busting with a desire for vengeance, I don't think wild 'osses would have dragged the words out of my lips. You do look bad, and no wonder! Frettin', I be bound?"

Plantagenet flung at her a glance of disgust. "There, there," he muttered, "that will do. You and I, my good woman, never can be mother and son. You've done me damage enough; not, however, by splitting—you ought to have split before—but by taking me out of my proper sphere. Come, be good enough to release me." She had clutched the arm that was powerless, the arm in the sling. "I must catch my train. Do you hear what I say?"

"In a moment," she responded. "Tell me, is Sir Robert going to do the handsome?"

"Eh?" almost shouted her big son. "What's that to you, Mrs. Hodge? That is my affair. But if you suppose I have come here to beg, you are in error. I never descend to beggary. If I have a right I—"

"But you have no rights," she whimpered, pitifully.

"Indeed!"

"None. And that's what made me determined to meet you when I heard you was gone up to the Court. Here, I've got a bit saved, and you may as well have it now as later on. 'Tain't a lot, but 'twill help at a pinch," putting her hand in her pocket.

"What do you mean?" cried Plantagenet, shaking her off indignantly. "You don't suppose, woman, do you, that I would take *your* money?"

She held out a leathern pocket-book filled with bank-notes, but he spurned it with anger, turned on his heel, and left her without a word.

She had met him about forty yards or so below the lodge gates toward the village. A bend of the road, with overhanging trees, concealed the entrance to the park from the vulgar gaze of the village-green, and as Plantagenet took this turn he was out of sight in little more than half a minute.

She had not expected such treatment. It was an impulse of the mother's heart, with its inscrutable, undying affection, that induced her to make an effort to conquer his obvious aversion. Thought she: "He does not realize how deeply I love him. I will force him to understand this by giving him all I have to give. That will soften his heart toward me." Alas! however, the poor woman omitted from her calculation the element of superbity which had been engendered in her son's breast by long training. She did not comprehend the artificial distance which her own act of deception had placed between them, still less that she, the mother who bore him, who had stealthily watched him from a distance like the timid Hebrew the infant Moses, was an object of loathing to her own flesh and blood. True, she was soon enough made aware of the

differentiation which divided them, nevertheless she cherished the notion that blood would prove thicker than water, and that when he grasped the wealth of affection she entertained for him he could but requite it, though mayhap in a patronizing way.

A short five minutes disillusioned her. The man pushed her from him, and flung back her sacrificial offering in her face. He saw in her nothing more than a coarse, red-faced, bloated female, whose intrusive generosity appeared in the light of an impertinence. And so he cut it short, and virtually bade her keep her gifts to herself, and abandon all claim on him.

Such a blow to a woman in a diseased condition of body—and Martha was alcoholized so as to be on the verge of corruption—descended with crushing force. Her hypertrophied frame reeled and staggered. Her overcharged arteries sent the thickened blood in a volume to the heart, her head whizzed, her eyes flashed fire, and with a groan she fell prone in the ditch by the roadside in an apoplectic fit.

The woman who kept the lodge was an ancient retainer, whose sense of hearing had departed long years ago. The thud of the heavy body falling on the grass to her ear was inaudible. So there Martha lay, helpless, head downward in the ditch, asphyxiated, the life-blood oozing from her mouth.

For perhaps ten long minutes—a sufficient time to sever the thread of existence—not longer, then a brisk foot came plodding along the road, and a sonorous voice trolled aloud, "Ochone, widow Machree," as its owner turned the corner of the road and came upon the scene of horror. "Bedad, thin," muttered Mike Conolly, as he stole up to what at first glance appeared to be a huge bundle of clothes pitched into the ditch, "some lucky devil's gone and murthered the ould baste for her money, sure! Arrah, arrah! H'wat a pitee now I hadn't a hand in't? Hwish, ould woman," shaking her vehemently, "did they cut yer throat, now, or, be the holy hill of Tara, how did they finish ye; Sorra a stick in the gizzard have ye got about ye! Mayhap 'twas a fit afther all—a lashin' too much of the dthrink, and a toight pair of stays, sure! Annyhow, it's dead as a door-nail y'are, and—and—h'wat the blazes is this now?"

His hand had lighted upon the purse of notes.

With greedy eye and trembling hand the Irishman counted the contents. "Won hundert," he hissed, *sotto voce;* "and fifteen, by the holy Moses; and twinty more's eighty, no, sivinty, as Oi'm a sinner; and foive is sivinty-foive. Wid a small fortin loike this it's mesilf 'ud be a dale safer somewhere's ilse. To think now of that barr'l of a crayture ownin' this lot. Bedad, thin, she may've got it from her son, the big telly wid the broken arm. But that's naythur here nor there. Oi'd betther be rayplacin' ye, mother darlint, in the ditch, sure, where Oi found ye, and then, avick, Oi'll be off to the Wist, to the land of the fray. The cloimit of Marmyon, sure, moight be a troifle warrum. Good-bye, t'ye, mother, and luck to yer sowl!"

Wherewith he laid Martha in the ditch, stole carefully over the opposite fence, and dodged behind the hedge. The road was lonely, and he met no one for at least a mile, while long before that was

traversed he had contrived to tie up his face, as though he were suffering from toothache and to stain his naturally ruddy features with tobacco-juice. It would have been difficult for an unobservant rustic to identify him after this metamorphosis—except by his tongue.

A man of extraordinary perception and immense versatility, Mike Conolly resolved to work as little as possible. He had a few shillings in his pocket, but he would not avail himself of the line, on the contrary he selected by-ways where he could, guiding himself by the sign-posts, and described the best part of a circle, taking a very wide radius, so as to keep clear of the metropolitan police, of whom for reasons of his own he stood in considerable dread. He made in the first instance for Westerham, and then for Redhill and Dorking. At this point he ventured to contract his circle, following the road to Epsom. He had walked steadily for twelve hours, and it was pitch dark; so he willingly complied with the request of a drunken laborer to see him home, and in return for this service was granted shelter. In the morning he resumed his march, and got as far as Kingston, where he put on a bold front, and purchased a daily paper. There, to his infinite relief, was, in the provincial news, a three-line notice of the sudden death of a landlady in Kent, but no mention of robbery. Reassured in a measure, yet suspecting that the money would be missed, he purchased a new suit of clothes with poor Martha's one five-pound note, shaved off every vestige of hair on his face, and took the train to Liverpool. A liner was on the eve of starting, and he managed to secure a berth on board her. He need not have been so apprehensive, so stealthy, for in his case the proverb "The wicked fleeth when no man pursueth" was verified. But he could not shake off the horrible thought that the detectives were after him; hence, as soon as he landed on American soil, he lost not a moment in making tracks for the South. He had compatriots and congeners wherever there was an Irish colony, and among them he fancied himself safe—as indeed he was.

To return to that miserable scene, close to the proud gates of Marmyon Court, where the woman that influenced its fortunes so largely lay still warm, but forever speechless. It was but a few moments after Conolly had made good his escape when a carriage containing Mrs. Frankalmoign, Miss Ida, and two noble ladies drove up from the opposite direction—*i.e.*, the village green. The hideous spectacle at once caused the coachman to reign up, and two out of the four ladies, including Miss Ida, to drop off in a faint. Their advent, of course, had the effect of alarminng both the Court and the village. What remained of Martha Hodge was borne to her old and evil home. They sent post-haste for a doctor—a precaution rigorously observed when it is too late. Then Belinda preserved the unities by an attack of hysterics—albeit between her and her mother no love was lost—and for once the doors of the Marmyon Arms were closed, and the population perforce had to go to bed sober.

The Court was, or affected to be, upset. Lady Marmyon, with upturned eye, vowed that Martha had invoked upon herself the wrath of high Heaven, while Sir Robert remarked to Mrs. Frankalmoign, with his regrets for such an untoward occurrence within the

limits of his demesne, that "It was—er—ah—a tragedy in low life, whereunto Mrs. Frankalmoign sighed *a là* Siddons, and gently pushed forward her glass for another bumper of champagne. As for Miss Ida, after the shock was over, her horror melted into anger, and she vowed that the ghastly, hideous thing would haunt her for months.

At this juncture, however, an ugly problem protruded itself. Ought Plantagenet to be at once informed of what had occurred? And if so, how would he act?

Both these queries sorely puzzled the baronet. However, after some reflection, he retired to the recesses of the library and wrote as follows:

"My dear Planny.—I meant to have deferred my epistle on your affairs until to-morrow, though I may tell you that I have already wired my solicitors to redeem the post-obit bonds bearing your name which Mr. Blaydon holds. I am compelled, however, to avoid delay for a very painful reason. The poor woman who, I suppose I may assume, was your mother—Martha Hodge—dropped down in an apoplectic fit, and was discovered by our friends the Frankalmoigns lying prone by the roadside; in fact, if you will pardon the abruptness, beyond the power of human aid. I need not apologize for thus breaking this intelligence to you, because, to be perfectly frank, your relations with the deceased were never, from the day after your birth, those of mother and son. I leave it to you whether you choose to take any steps with reference to her small property; I conclude she had saved money, though probably little. But I may suggest that her daughter has perhaps, under the circumstances, the first claim on whatever she may have left in the way of money, and, if it is your wish, the girl may succeed her mother at the public-house. There is, however, one aspect of this miserable business to which you will have to award your fullest consideration. It is briefly this: Poor Martha Hodge never made an affidavit of your identity. True, she deposed certain data to me, and I considered them verifiable. But I am bound to add that in a court of law you might be held to be my son. The position, therefore, is more than ever complicated, and I should wish it naturally to be cleared up finally and satisfactorily. I may say, therefore, that in the event of your deciding to carry out your intention, as previously stated, of abandoning all claim in favor of the man whom I am compelled to believe to be the son of my body lawfully begotten, I in turn am also prepared to secure you an annuity suitable to a gentleman—let me say, if you please, to my foster-son. And now, dear Planny, I need add no more than that I am, as ever,

"Yours most affectionately,

"Robert Marmyon.

"R. S. V. P."

This letter startled Plantagenet. But he was much the reverse of sentimental, except where Ida Frankalmoign was concerned, and it never once occurred to his mind that his mother's sudden death might be laid at his door. He sat down, therefore, and dashed off a reply with the sort of directness that was his wont. It may be

worth while to contrast this missive with the diplomatic document which had evoked it.

"DEAR SIR ROBERT,—Thanks much for your courtesy and kindness. I will not affect to be plunged in grief on behalf of the woman who played you false and pushed me into a position where I was necessarily out of place. I shall not touch her little property or meddle at all. Let her daughter have it. It is her right. Neither have I the least notion of taking a mean advantage of the accident of the poor woman having neglected to swear an affidavit. On the contrary, I am, as I have already said, anxious to insure the rightful heir his reversion. Your kindness in taking up the post-obit I much appreciate, and if, as I understand, you propose to secure me the annuity by way of compensation for Errol's crime against me, I must request that this be to the detriment of the wrong-doer, and not of the heir. I remain, dear Sir Robert,

"Yours obediently,

"PLANTAGENET."

"Er—ah!" gasped Sir Robert, as he perused this hastily. "Poor boy! He cannot bring himself to write the odious 'Hodge.' No wonder! no wonder! Poor, poor Planny! What would this world be without wealth and honor? Upon my word I can't conceive. One would not be so much crushed and trampled on as suffocated and strangled. How the fellows who've got nothing exist—that surpasses my limited comprehension. Bah! They don't exist. They court labor, and drink, and sleep simply *pour passer le temps*, till the friendly old man with the scythe and the hour-glass comes to set them free. Poor, poor Planny! If I were in his shoes! Well, by Jove, it's lucky I'm not. I'm afraid I should fight like a Bengal tiger for a heritage which I knew was not mine by right divine. Yes, I haven't the backbone, the sense of rectitude of Planny. Perhaps that is because I'm made of different stuff. Anyhow, the poor fellow has so much positive good in his composition that I must, as a matter of obligation, break his terrible fall for him. I ought to allow him a thousand a year, but really in these hard times, and with all my outgoings, I—er—ah—I don't see my way to that. H'm, I wonder whether five hundred would satisfy him? It's a large sum. Many a curate would be more than happy with half the amount. Still, Planny has been educated in expensive ideas. I have taught him, I fear, to be extravagant. Suppose, now, I was to say six hundred? That nobody could call mean. It's fifty pounds a month—a respectable allowance for a quiet bachelor. Yes; I'll spare him six hundred; and, after all, when once the racket of this tour with St. Vincent is over, that terrible infliction, my son Robert, need not cost much. I wish to goodness—however, it's no use wishing! We all have our crosses, so Orphrey tells us, and mine has been constructed on a colossal scale."

That is rather a long soliloquy, but it shall be recorded as an evidence of Sir Robert's mental state. He had worshiped his idols, rank and money, so long and so fervently that every consideration seemed to center round them. Whatever did not tend to bolster up his pride he regarded with secret aversion. Now, it happened that the man

whom he could but own as first-born wounded that same inordinate pride of his, and so in his inmost heart he half wished him at the bottom of the Atlantic.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MORE REVELATIONS.

Sir Robert Marmyon had promised to care for Polly Williams during Robert's absence, and when he gave the promise he fully meant to be as good as his word. Perhaps he thought he had done so by presenting her with a sovereign, and directing his bailiff to administer a caution to Shepherd Williams to keep an eye on his daughter or it might be worse for him. Beyond this, however, he did nothing. He was not even aware whether she was at home or not, having in fact dismissed the girl from his recollection.

As he was not altogether, except in respect of cutting down his laborers' wages on his huge home-farm, hard-hearted, it was perhaps as well for his peace of mind that he omitted to witness the change that came over the fairest flower of humbler Marmyon, of the Marmyon of workers. Polly's roses faded, the luster departed from her eye, and the merry ring from her voice. Everybody remarked it, including Mr. Orphrey, who tried to proffer a useless rather than a hollow sympathy. At the Court alone the great people were in blank ignorance of all that appertained to one so utterly insignificant. They neither knew nor cared.

When in the heyday of middle life Martha Hodge passed hence so tragically and unexpectedly, Belinda was, as may be surmised, dumfounded. The suddenness of the blow seemed to have deprived the buxom young woman of the power of speech and motion. At that crisis Polly hastened to the aid of her friend, and perhaps found a small solace for her own wounded spirit in sharing another's grief.

A death of any kind, and particularly a sudden death, brings in its train a host of novel responsibilities for the survivors, and though Miss Belinda at another time might have been as capable as any of her sex, being a resolute, virile, voluble young woman, of tackling those difficulties, in her stunned condition she was glad to lean for advice and support on feebler and more maidenly Polly Williams.

After it was all over, the solemn funeral, the terrible ordeal of next Sunday's sermon, with its reference to the appropriate suffrage in the Anglican litany, and the not very flattering moral evolved from the sudden departure of an erring sheep, Belinda tried to settle down. The house was hers for the present, and she lost no time in petitioning for the transfer of the license—a request which, to the chagrin of more than one retainer at the Court, was granted promptly, Sir Robert accurately divining that if Miss Belinda was cut adrift she would land herself at once on Plantagenet, a humiliating and costly contingency he was willing enough to spare his adopted son.

It was a Sunday morning. Errol, who for reasons of his own not very difficult to surmise had begun to pay court to his father, had actually condescended to occupy a seat in the family pew and was returning home arm-in-arm with the baronet. It happened, too, that

Polly Williams, who had pretermitted the privilege of listening to Mr. Orphrey, had strolled forth alone—solitude was her greatest luxury just now, as it is for the most part to love-lorn maidens—and espying a few early primroses through a gap in the park palings, tripped through the lodge gates unobserved, wended her way beneath the trees that overhung the fence, and was in the act of purloining her harmless prize—the first little rose of spring—when the "er—ah" of Sir Robert grated on her ear, and as she peeped through the high palings she espied that potentate leaning heavily on Errol.

"I don't quite make out—er—ah—what is the—er—ah—matter—matter with my side. Whether it's heart, or indigestion, or a symptom of *angina pectoris*. The sensation is—er—ah—most distressing. Er—ah, the pain shoots through me, and it is followed by a sort of breathlessness. Stand still a minute, will you, Errol, I feel very odd."

"Won't you get as far as the lodge? You can sit down and rest there a minute," suggested Errol, diffidently.

"Er—ah—no; I'll lean against the palings. It's nothing—nothing. I shall be all right in a minute. Church, I suppose! Sitting too long in one position. That dear fellow, Orphrey, considers prolixity to be a form of piety. Ugh! there it is again!"

Errol stood still in silence some three or four minutes, noting that his father seemed pale and tremulous. By degrees, however, the spasmodic pains ceased, but the baronet still leaned heavily on his arm with his back resting on the park palings.

"Are you better, father?"

"Er—ah—yes. I'm coming round by degrees. Don't attempt to move just yet; it would cause a return of the detestable sensations. By the bye, you were talking just now about Robert?"

Polly, who had crouched down behind the palings to escape observation—for Sir Robert was notoriously virulent against every kind of trespass, whether it chanced to be for game or primroses—pricked up her ears at the mention of the word Robert, and was at once all attention.

"I was remarking," responded Errol, "that Robert, although naturally clever and all that sort of thing, is a hopeless vulgarian. Possibly Horace St. Vincent may succeed in rubbing off a few of the awful angles that so totally disfigure the man, and in curing some of his insane theories; but after all has been done what is the quotient?—why, a fellow who juggles with his knife at dinner in a way to make one's blood run cold, and gets helplessly drunk afterward."

Polly drew her breath and gave a big gasp. This was new.

"Er—ah—yes," sighed Sir Robert. "The fellow's manners would disgrace a pig, and he certainly imbibed too freely at the Grand Hotel, as I explained before."

Again Polly gasped, and a tear fell on the primroses.

"Besides," continued Errol, "how in the name of common-sense will a cub of that sort comport himself in a drawing-room? He will pass, no doubt, in a Yankee drinking-bar, or perhaps at a German *table d'hôte*, where the piggery is about on a par with his own; but here—here in the county of Kent, what will people say—and by George, too, what will they think?"

Sir Robert shuddered from head to foot.

"Another spasm?" inquired Errol, with well-feigned sympathy.

"Er—ah—no. I'm coming round rapidly. As regards Robert, you are right. One cannot but anticipate with apprehension his arrival on this scene."

"I do," rejoined Errol, with marked emphasis. "I don't relish being the laughing-stock of half a county. But you would persist in recognizing the man, and you have, father, by your own act and deed, saddled yourself with a white elephant."

"What could I do?" whined the baronet, peevishly.

"Do!" echoed his son, scornfully, "why, give him a sum down, in consideration of his renunciation of his rights, if you can call a claim like his a right. He was red-hot to emigrate and marry that girl—what's her name? He should have been humored."

"Yes," replied the other, dubiously. "But that was not feasible. He could not have been bought out except at a fabulous sacrifice—at least, had he taken lesser terms, he could have revived his claim at my decease on the plea of compulsion—hence that plan was, in essence, abortive. No. It is worse than useless regretting the past. I have acted for the best, and if I am disgraced I am disgraced."

The color tingled in Polly's cheeks. The idea of her Robert—her noble-hearted Robert—being a disgrace!

"Perhaps," suggested Errol, with almost sanctimonious meekness, "the wind may be tempered to the shorn lamb. It is sometimes, you know."

"Eh, what?"

"I mean—perhaps the man may drown himself, or get shot, or smashed in collision, or anything of the sort! A tour round the world involves certain positive risks, I am glad to say."

Sir Robert shrugged his shoulders. "My dear Errol," he said, solemnly, "believe me, the Gordian knot of one's difficulties is never cut in that way. You might tie a ten-pounder round the neck of a fellow like that, and throw him overboard in mid-ocean. He'd turn up, bless you, like a cork!"

Errol laughed. "We won't be in a hurry, father," he rejoined, "to anticipate the very worst. I should like to have a 'pony' with you on the chance of his reappearing in the flesh?"

"Er—ah!" said Sir Robert, testily. "This is Sunday. We have just returned from church, and the conversation seems to be taking a turn that I cannot approve. Give me a hoist, if you please; I will try and crawl home with the aid of your arm—and as regards Robert, I have done my duty by him as a father, and I shall continue to do so, whatever may be the sacrifice of personal inclination I have to make. Now!"

The palings creaked, as their lord pushed himself from them and resumed the perpendicular. Then Polly heard the retreating steps of father and son; and as they slowly proceeded up the avenue, she crept from her hiding-place, with her primroses, her tears, and her scarlet cheeks, and walked as fast as her feet could carry her to the Marmyon Arms, in search of comfort and consolation.

"Belinda!" she shrilled, with flashing eyes, interrupting by the bye, that young person in the middle of her Sabbath repast—a very solemn season.

Miss Belinda deposited her knife and fork, her mouth being filled to extreme repletion with boiled pork and pease-pudding, the handiwork of poor Mrs. Gipps, who was in waiting upon her in the double capacity of cook and parlor-maid. Then, with a glance of stupidity at her friend's rather excited and hysterical expression, she composed herself to attention reluctantly enough.

Polly thereupon narrated her entire experience, ending with an outburst of pent-up emotion in the form of a torrent of tears.

"To think," she sobbed, "of my Robert being a disgrace, and of them two wishin' he were dead!"

"It are 'ard-'earted, it are!" responded Miss Belinda, in a sort of dutiful tone, at the same time recovering the knife and fork and recommencing a vigorous attack on the pig and pulse, plus potatoes.

"Have a mossel of pork?" she suggested, after a prolonged pause, interrupted only by Polly's sobs.

"I couldn't do it, Belinda," whimpered the poor girl, "but thankee all the same. No, I didn't come for my dinner. I don't want no dinner. What I come about was to ask you, Belinda, to give me a help if you can. I ain't got many friends now."

Again the knife and fork dropped, but Miss Belinda's face rather hardened.

"I don't know what 'tis you wants, Polly," she remarked, with just a tinge of asperity in her not very musical voice. "But you knows as poor mother disappointed me. I did think as she'd saved a bit, and got it hid somewhere's in the 'ouse, but—"

"Belinda," interrupted Polly, almost angrily, "you don't go to think as I should beg of you for money?"

"What is it, then, Polly? Why don't you say?"

"Can't you see as I be a'most choked with sobbin'? I arn't tooked on so since *he* left, and it's my belief that wicked h'old man, Sir Robert, went and made *he* drunk to prevent his seeing me! That's what I thinks, Belinda!'

"'Tain't likely," was the curt rejoinder. "Sir Robert's dead against drink, except in a mod'rit way. He sent word to me that if the 'ouse were conducted respectable I might stop and welcome, but if so be as there was bad behavior I must turn out. But Sir Robert's notions ain't nothin' to do with favors. What be the favor, Pol, as you wants done?"

"Yes," gasped Polly, who was brimming over with indignation. "Sir Robert's nothing to do with it. What I were a-going to ask you was, if you'd try to find out for me whereabouts in Ameriky my Robert is—acause I should dearly like to write him just one word of warnin.' It's my belief, Belinda, as they don't *mean* him to come back!"

"But how can I find out any better nor you?"

"They won't tell *me*. They daren't. But if you was to talk promiscuous to Mrs. Mazebrook she'd tell 'ee She knows, depend on't."

"Right you is, Polly. She does know, if any one does, but whether she'll tell's another thing. Howsoever I'll make the trial to please you, as you're that distressed, though if I was in your shoes I wouldn't go to worrit myself. Robert's the sort of lad to

take care of hisself, and Sir Robert's correct when he says that it 'ud puzzle a man twice his size to put him out of the world. Come, Pol dear, don't 'ee cry no more, and I'll give you my promise to ask Mrs. Mazebrook the question arter tea-time this very day. She be glad of company of a Sunday evenin'."

Miss Belinda was as good as her word. She strolled up to the Court after dusk, invaded the housekeeper's sanctum, and—fortunately for the success of her mission—found Madam Mazebrook in a very pliant and agreeable humor. The good woman had dined on duck, an edible—possibly owing to the accompaniment of sage and onions—calculated to produce sweet content in the mind of a woman of her sort. Moreover, as a sedative to that duck, she had furtively administered to herself about a pint of the best port in the cellar. Her condition, in short, was tranquil, and the smiles that wreathed her mouth seemed encouraging to Miss Belinda, who opened the ball with judicious irrelevance on the weather, bounded off to her own troubles, and ended by inquiries after the health at the Court.

Mrs. Mazebrook rather appreciated any reference to the great of the earth. She considered herself to be a kind of Mohammed's coffin, poised between the heaven of aristocracy and the earth of democracy—as an intermediary between superiors and inferiors.

"Thank you, my dear," she responded, graciously, "we are all well, very." "We," by the bye, was her familiar way of linking herself with the people in the drawing-room. "My lady," she continued, "were upset, as is nat'ral, about your poor mother's untimely end, but she've rekivered by now."

"And the rest on 'em, Mrs. Mazebrook?"

"Mr. Errol's at 'ome, and of course, as you knows, his elder brother, 'Odge as used to was, is on his travels."

Belinda bowed, or rather nodded. "Robert," she replied, "always were a favorite of mine when he were my brother. Many and many's the larrupping I've saved him as a boy, for mother couldn't abear him, not bein' her own, don't you see, Mrs. Mazebrook? I do hope as he's enjoyin' of himself, poor chap, though he be a fish out of water."

"Ah!" ejaculated Mrs. Mazebrook. "That reminds me of summat. Just like a good girl, go to that there cupboard and open the third drawer. There be a letter there, bain't there?"

Belinda did as she was bid, and from the spot indicated extracted an envelope covered in the corner with some strange-looking stamps. She opened it in response to a gesture from Hester Mazebrook, and handed it to her without a vestige of curiosity.

The housekeeper pulled the candle toward her, essayed to read a line or so, and then flung it down, rather impatiently for her. "There!" she exclaimed, "blest if I hain't tried to read that letter a half a dozen times. It were littering about on the floor of Mr. Errol's bedroom, so I thought it only proper, Belinda, to keep it away from the servants' eyes. The imperent curiosity of them maids surpasses all belief. Can you read the 'andwritin', my dear?" throwing the letter across the table to her indifferently.

"Yes," replied Belinda; "I think, I'm sure I can. It's a letter to Mr. Errol, and the printed 'eadin' is 'Burlbec's Hotel, San Francisco.'"

"Then, my dear, read on, only don't raise your voice; and if anybody should come in by accident slip it in your pocket. Now."

Belinda smiled. Clearly the Fates were most propitious. Then she read, slowly and distinctly.

"DEAREST ERROL,—The ball is on the spot, and a single stroke will hole the red. By the best of flukes, in the *salon* of the "King Lud," I stumbled on our mutual friend, Dolopy. He has come across on some first-class mining business down this way, and I was not sorry to chum with him, for your affectionate brother proves to be more of a trial than I imagined he would be. *En route* he picked up with a monster parson—one of these padres who shine at St. Alban's and in Margaret Street—and this old demon simply monopolized him, to my very great delight; for Dolopy is splendid company, and gentlemen fresh from the plow-tail hardly come under that category. Not to be prolix, we three—not the parson, *Corpo di Baccho*, no, not that—made tracks for 'Frisco sharp, and here we are for some time; so you may safely write to the above address if you've anything to say. Now for the point: Dolopy, you must know, has a mine in this region which is supposed to contain gold. When I say it's his I lie, or, rather, employ a *façon de parler*. It's the property of some two dozen rascals, each of whom has a claim on it. The mine, however, is not precisely the point, only what our logic coach used to call the inseparable accident of the point. It is, in fact, situated in the centre of a district which does contain real mines in full work, and there seems to be some sort of feud between the Irish and the Yankee miners. Your dear brother takes a lively and personal interest in all labor questions, and it may be gratifying to you to know his bias on this occasion happened to be in favor of the Milesians, because the Yankees here have a pleasant and playful habit of settling all Irish problems with revolvers. For myself, I feel it to be more consonant with my *rôle* as a Bohemian and Sybarite to avoid thrusting anybody's head into a fatal noose. But your dear brother does not require pressure. He is only too eager to court the retributive bullet. The real danger is lest, when the *melée* comes, and it is imminent—so much so that I keep as far as possible from the scene of action—the Yankees, who are preternaturally just, and can contradistinguish a fool from a knave, will spare an interfering Englishman on account of his nationality. Dolopy thinks not, and is quite charmingly *sanguine*—forgive the pun; but time will show.

"*Tout à vous,* HORACE.

"P.S.—I open my letter to add that your dear brother's Irish friends have just been so very obliging as to earn a tribute of Yankee gratitude by blowing up a mine and killing a brace of American citizens, besides wounding a score or so more. It's a poor heart that never rejoices."

"Well," murmured Mrs. Mazebrook, "that are a very pecooliar letter, and I don't quite see what the gentleman as writes it, Mr. Horace St. Vincent, I thinks, be a meanin' of."

"But I do," snapped Miss Belinda. "I sees through the stone wall. There's them, Missus Mazebrook, as don't want our Robert

to have his rights. You knows that as well as me. And they people—I want to mention no names—has sent the poor fellow to 'Meriky to get rid of 'im. Not as they'll finish 'im, not they. They only puts 'im in the way of danger, just as I were a readin' King David did to him as were the 'usband of Barthsheeber. That's it, mum."

But Mrs. Mazebrook would listen to nothing of that sort. The Court was in her eyes impeccable.

"Miss Hodge," she replied, severely, "I must ask you to mind who you're a-speakin' to, and what you're a-sayin' of. You're a hignerant girl as can't understand a letter like that, and I'm sorry I give it you to read, that I be."

"So bain't I," retorted Miss Belinda, bouncing out of the room,

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CHAPTER XXIX.

TALKS—GOOD AND ANTI-GOOD.

We left Robert on board the "King Lud," in close conference with Father L'Isle. That single-hearted priest had but one thought underlying every action and every word—the addition of sheep to the fold, or the safe guarding of those who had submitted to the guidance of the Church. Half apostle, half pastor, he lived a life as utterly apart from that of ordinary buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage mortals as though he were the denizen of another planet. It was this indifference to all except what he deemed the highest interests of humanity that attracted Robert toward him. At Marmyon he had listened to his eloquence, but when others shed tears his eyes were dry; when others hastened to gain an experience he held aloof; but he had drunk in very greedily the ethical portion of the preacher's discourse, more especially when it dealt with the gross inequalities of life; and in his championship of the poor and denunciation of riches Robert recognized the true echoes of a Voice that uttered some eighteen hundred odd years ago—a Voice that is heard now more widely and distinctly than it was then.

"And so," said Father L'Isle, "you have unexpectedly become the heir of a grand inheritance and of a high social position. Well, my friend, you of all men must be most keenly cognizant of the immense leverage for good or evil money affords. You know by heart the sufferings of those who toil; you realize how largely they would be elevated by the addition to their lot of civilizing influences; and in the future, so far as it is lawful to anticipate, you will have it in your power to benefit positively these humble men who bring to you, and for your sole beenfit, the labor of a life-time."

"Yes," rejoined Robert; "and if I live I shall treat them as brothers. I have shared their work, and 'tis but square they should share my cake."

Father L'Isle smiled at this homely simile. "Yes," he replied, "that, so far, is a good resolve. But, my friend, the mere 'share and share' does not cover my meaning. If you were to divide your heritage equally among your men, whom do you suppose you would benefit? Not the men, I fear, but the brewer and the distiller—a

pretty pair of horse-leeches to absorb your precious substance! No; I am, in a modified sense, a Christian Socialist, but not a Communist. My desire is that the people should be less crushed in this world in order that they may be the less cramped in preparing for the next. I would have you give the people the amplest opportunities of earning more, as a matter of simple equity. I would counsel you to sacrifice shoddy splendor and barbarous ostentation in order to do justly by those who work. But you would have to think of other considerations than those which are merely material. Man can not live by bread alone."

"If you mean," observed Robert, "to educate them and make gentlemen of them—why, I should say that would be a job over your head, and certainly over mine."

"I should like to see their brains expand," rejoined Father L'Isle, "but especially their consciences."

"Ah," ejaculated the young man, "that's not in my line! I bain't a parson, sir; I'm a laboring-man."

"Who is being metamorphosed into a gentleman," retorted the other.

Robert shrugged his shoulders. "That is the notion," he said, "but it won't work. They begin by putting liquor to my lips, and cigars in my mouth, and smart clothes on my back. But all that won't alter me—inside or outside, in mind or in manners. And what's more, sir, I don't want to be altered. I'm good enough for myself."

Father L'Isle looked at him earnestly. "If I were to tell you," said he, "that we were all capable of improvement, you would admit the general rule, and consider yourself the exception. But you will pardon my stating my firm conviction that you need an entire change, though not of the kind Sir Robert Marmyon desires for you."

The young man looked stupid purposely, but he realized what the good father was aiming at.

"A change," continued the clergyman, "of such a character as to raise you, in spite of all your lack of culture and book-learning, far above the very highest aristocracy. You regard the social order into which you have been suddenly and surprisingly admitted with abhorrence, because of their selfish indifference to the great human substratum on whose lives they exist in luxury. That is only one, and the narrowest, view of this question. I blame them, not merely for their lack of the broad principle of equity, but because, having such opportunities, they misuse or neglect them. The best of them, with very few exceptions, bury their talent of wealth in a napkin; the less exemplary—that is to say, the average—spend their money on vice, pleasure, and in gambling. Their loftiest pursuit is the butchery of game; their notion of manliness to harry a miserable fox, hare, or stag. They sustain, without an attempt at concealment, in barbaric splendor a city's population of venial women, besides consigning tens of thousands of the hungry daughters of the people to the livelihood of depravity. True, they support the Church as a political and social institution. But what a mockery for the Church to lean on the arm of men who are the open and acknowledged devotees of the devil! Aristocracy is becoming yearly more and more impossible, because of its utter de-

pravity. And it does not stop short at self-destruction; it drags the people after its chariot through the mire of debauchery and immorality. It is to the aristocracy that we owe that gigantic curse, that practical antichrist of England, the race-course, with its myriad vile concomitants. The race-course has created an army of ruffians who exist on lies, trickery, and the lowest devices of gambling. But I need say no more. Enough if you, young man—you who have bitterly earned your bread by honest sweat—should be warned in time not to descend to the level of your social equals. You will do so without religion. With it you will rise superior to the temptations of an exalted and therefore a perilous position."

Robert gazed across the ocean, the billows whereof cast their spray in his face—meditatively murmuring, half to himself, "I hope anyhow to hold my own, and follow my own light."

"Yes," rejoined Father L'Isle, quickly, "if the light that is in you be a true guide—which in reality is the very point at issue."

"That's as may be," rejoined Robert, sententiously. "I suppose your idea is that when I have the means I should back your Church."

"You utterly misapprehend me," answered Father L'Isle; "I meant no such thing. I am not of the number of those who angle for rich or titled converts. Granted that, I can not close my eyes to the fact that your influence in the future may be exercised for God or for His enemies. That thought has not evoked my words. When I establish a chain of communication between the soul that is in me and that of another, I think only of the paramount interests of that individual soul with whom I am for the moment in communication. It is enough, my young friend, even once in a man's life, to have been the humble means of insuring the eternal happiness of one single item of the vast human family."

And he placed his broad hand tenderly on Robert's shoulder, adding, quietly, as he took out his watch, "It is just noon. At noon daily, I repeat the angelic salutation in accordance with the ancient custom of the Church, and I add thereunto certain devotions of the rule by which I am bound. So I must retire to my berth for the nonce. Think over my words. Think of them as the utterance of a friend."

"Yes," answered Robert, "I will give them a thought. Not that I can follow all you say, but I see this, that you don't muddle up what's right and what's wrong like some do."

And so he descended to the saloon to find his traveling companions, St. Vincent and Dolopy, hard on at *écarté*—not exactly for love, if the small pile of coin at the side of each might be taken to serve as an index—in fact for mutual plunder.

"Well, my young friend," remarked Horace St. Vincent, severely, "you seem rather fascinated by your parson? Given you the straight tip, eh? Pray, don't let either of us interfere with your enjoyment of clerical society, only don't inflict it on us. If you were to plant that old party on me I should at once drop overboard. Better to be drowned out and out than to be bored. Eh, Dol?"

"I don't know," observed Captain Dolopy. "In my line of business it never pays to miss a chance. There's no saying but that the venerable priest might have a few pieces concealed about him.

In that case I could accommodate him with some first-class investments of a decidedly speculative character. And by the bye, happy thought! I really want a live bishop to go on the board of my Vintage Manufacturing Company. He's not a bishop, is he? No. Well, that don't signify. Depend upon it, he pals with bishops when he's at home. What do you say, Horace?"

"I say," retorted Horace, rather grumpily, "that it's all dog-fiend you're talking. For mercy's sake don't bring that octopus of a man down on me! I should never shake him off. Bless you, Dol, don't I know his cloth by rote? Wasn't I for three mortal years at Oxford, in the swim of all the parsons in the place?"

"It's my opinion," said Robert, with rural directness of speech, "that the gentleman don't want the acquaintance of either of you."

"And does want yours, Mr. Robert Marmyon? Well, let me congratulate him on his excellent taste."

Whereat—the words issuing from the sarcastic lips of Mr. Horace St. Vincent—both men laughed long and low, the more so because the object of their laughter, after flushing up to his temples with wrath, turned on his heel and went aloft again.

"Had him, Hoddy!" observed Dolopy, chuckling.

"Why, certainly. That speech of his was just a trifle too flamboyant. The cheek of the cad!"

"I'll remember it," said the other.

The voyage was monotony itself to Robert. Had it not been for the accident of encountering Captain Dolopy, Horace St. Vincent might have tried to lay himself out to be in a certain sense chummy. As it was, that gentleman, when he was not indulging in *tête-à-tête* talk with his friend—on which occasions they both gave him to understand very clearly that he was *de trop*—elected to play courtier to certain pretty ladies with whom he had scraped an acquaintance. Robert thereupon, except at meals, had to content himself with his own thoughts in a general way, though occasionally he enjoyed the society of Father L'Isle. At last, however, the dreary waste of waters was traversed, and he actually touched the soil of Columbia.

His own wish was to see something of New York and the Northern States, and he not only expressed it categorically to Horace St. Vincent, but even went so far as to hint that Sir Robert could not have intended him to follow his traveling companion like a schoolboy or a slave. He met, however, with little else in return for his remonstrance than cool insolence of the dogged and deaf variety.

"We," said Horace, with one of his nastiest sarcastic titters—"we, that is to say, Captain Dolopy and I, happen to be going to San Francisco. You can accompany us or not as you choose."

Robert looked the man full in his eyes and replied,

"Suppose I don't choose?"

"Well, my friend, you can of course consult your own tastes and convenience."

"Yes. Then, if you please, sir, be good enough to supply me with the necessary funds. Sir Robert—my father—has placed a large sum at your disposal for our mutual benefit, and—"

"And he has done so that his son may travel with me. Don't deceive yourself. That is the object of your tour. Of course, if Mr. Marmyon declines to avail himself of my society, why then—

simply, it can't be helped. I am not disposed to forego my engagements to suit his caprices."

"You refuse to supply me with the money of which you are trustee for my benefit?"

"Look here," interposed Captain Dolopy, who had accidentally overheard the latter part of this verbal duel, "it's no good your cutting up rough, Mr. Marmyon. My friend Horace here stands in a very delicate position with regard to your respected father, the more so because he is your mother's, and of course also your, cousin. Sir Robert charged him with a mission—as your pal, the priest, would call it. He was to be your guide and philosopher, it not your friend; and the understanding was that you were to follow his lead. Eh? you shake your head. What was it then?"

"Sir Robert wished us to form plans together."

"That's no answer—pardon me. Sir Robert really gave Horace *carte-blanche*—ah, I see you don't catch my meaning—the fullest liberty of action. Now Horace very naturally wishes to join me. I *must* go to 'Frisco. That is clear as daylight, and I don't quite perceive, that being so, why you should interpose any obstacle. It isn't good-natured, and I'm not surprised that Horace sticks to his programme. Why shouldn't he, pray?"

Robert reflected a moment. "Very well," he said, "I will go with you, but I go under compulsion, and for the matter of that I should have imagined that you would have preferred my room to my company?"

Horace laughed. He had allowed Captain Dolopy to speak for him. Now, however, he cut in—sharp.

"It's no use humbugging, Mr. Marmyon," he said. "You have your ideas. I mine. Captain Dolopy his. We may agree to agree, or agree to differ. But, so far as you and I are concerned, don't blunder. We are the Siamese twins for the present. I can't shunt you without violating my pact with Sir Robert, who is a sharp man of business; nor can you give me the go-by, except at your own risk, and assuredly not with my connivance. Now, do you see my meaning?"

"It's an arrangement I don't like," retorted Robert, angrily. "Nor would I have assented to it if I had foreseen how it was going to work."

"Just so," again interposed Captain Dolopy. "You feel a difficulty in assimilating with us. Your ideas and ours move in different grooves. Your experiences have not been ours, neither are our tastes on a level with yours. All of which, sir, is rough on you—that I admit. But for your comfort I may tell you that in the part of the States to which we are about to journey, there are to be found a number of people who do share your ideas. They will welcome you at 'Frisco. They will provide you with society after your own heart, and you will not feel life hang heavily when once you are among them."

"I don't understand you."

"To be perfectly plain, Mr. Marmyon, you, by habit and instinct, belong to the people. We, owing to the accident of birth and breeding, do not. It is our misfortune rather than our fault, but it has the effect, indisputably, of rendering men accustomed to club

and drawing-room existence very tiresome companions to you. Don't be offended with my plain speaking. I am only stating facts."

"I'm not offended," replied Robert. "Quite the t'other way. You can't be too straight with me. Yes, I know well enough I'm not one of your sort and never can be. You've had your training, and it's made you what you are. I've had mine, and I ought not to be ashamed of it. So—as you will, gentlemen. I'll yield to your wishes."

"Like a good-hearted fellow," suggested Horace, though whether in jest or in earnest was by no means apparent from his tone. It might have been either. And so, after all, Robert did yield, and the notion of anybody's company but theirs cheered him. He had begun to think about following the counsel of Father L'Isle, whose words sank deeper into the soul of his hearer than he himself suspected. That good man wished Robert a friendly farewell at Manhattan, under the impression that he had labored in vain during the voyage across, and that Robert was still far from the Kingdom of God. He little recked of the negative effect exercised upon an honest, simple mind by the cynical, unprincipled, callous chatter of two such utter Gallios and good-for-nothings as Dolopy and St. Vincent. In making the world and the things of the world repulsive they were unconsciously Father L'Isle's agents. They did more than half his work for him, and were preparing the plastic intelligence of an earnest though uninstructed seeker after truth to grasp the eternal verity, that there is no real good save the good which is of God. Nevertheless when he started in their uncongenial society for San Francisco, Robert as yet had only half learned that truth. He had learned it in theory from Father L'Isle's charmed lips, and by the logic of negation from the lubricious conversation of cynical voluptuaries. He had yet to be taught it practically in the school of experience, with all its accompanying bitterness and its revelation of the darker phases of human character.

CHAPTER XXX.

"PULQUE."

If a man were to advertise his intention of walking from Charing Cross to Westminster, at any hour of the day or night, with a quarter of a million sterling in his pocket, he would—*malgré* the inexhaustible resources of civilization—run a certain risk, rather less, however, than that usually incurred by the heir of a huge unearned increment. Robert little recked of the *arrière pensee* in the mind of his cheery co-traveler, Horace St. Vincent, or he would have turned his back on him and his congener, Captain Dolopy.

As it was, his relations with that exemplary pair of scoundrels rather improved after the storm narrated in the previous chapter. They suddenly changed their manner, and instead of pushing him aside as an unmitigated and insupportable nuisance—as had been the case throughout the passage across—they laid themselves out to be agreeable. Everything was done to promote his comfort and

convenience. Dolopy, who knew the States by heart, displayed all the qualities of an intelligent cicerone, and Horace found abundant scope for the play of that pleasant, when not personal, verbal causticity which he regarded as his chiefest accomplishment. Indeed, when, after slow stages, they actually arrived at San Francisco, the unsophisticated young man began to feel himself almost at home in their company, not realizing, as yet, their genius for acting a part—and a false one.

"The mine," remarked Dolopy, as they were indulging in cigars after sunset under a cool veranda, "lies about thirty miles odd to the south of a town called Jeffsville. Judge Potterer will meet us thereabouts, and then we can make tracks for the place itself—Long Camp. It's a sort of mining town, and the code in vogue is not that of Justinian or Napoleon, but of an eminent jurist you may have heard of, named Lynch."

Robert looked interested.

"A lawyer," added Horace, "whose practice it was to hang a man first and try him afterward. That was a method which insured mathematically the condign punishment of the guilty."

"What about the innocent?" inquired Robert.

"Ah!" ejaculated Dolopy, shrugging his shoulders. "There you are. You can't have everything in this world, don't you know, Mr. Marmyon? In the mining districts we consider it quite enough to make sure that a criminal don't get off."

"But," urged Robert, with serious emphasis—he failed to grasp the fact that these fine gentlemen seldom or never said what they meant—"the innocent, the innocent! Surely it is better that a hundred guilty men should escape than that one innocent man should suffer?"

"Is that your view?" rejoined Horace, dryly. "Well, then, to apply it. A handful of Egyptian rowdies murder an English doctor in the streets of Alexandria. Ergo—though I'm bound to say that was not the ostensible pretext, albeit I believe it to have been the real one—we pounded Alexandria to little bits."

"Or again," interposed Dolopy, "during the Indian mutiny a lot of infernal Sepoys butchered our women and children at Cawnpore; so we set to work and butchered a lot of women and children at Agra and elsewhere, their husbands and fathers being our fast friends and as guiltless of the massacre a hundred leagues off as you or I are."

"Yes," pleaded Robert, "but because nations lose their head when they're aggravated, it don't follow that judges ought to do likewise. A judge ought to be just. Ain't that so?"

"Theory, mere theory!" laughed Horace. "Come, now, my friend Robert Marmyon, let me put a case which you will be well able to appreciate the force of. Suppose Mr. Plantagenet Hodge had elected, instead of caving in like a pitiful idiot, to contest your claim to be Sir Robert's son and heir? Suppose the case had come into court, and there had been—as is inevitable—some hardish swearing on either side? You imagine, doubtless, that the judge would have summed up in your favor, because there can be no moral doubt in the mind of any sensible person that you are the man, and not Mr. Plantagenet, who is about as like Sir Robert or Lady Marmyon

as Monmouth resembles Macedon. But, my friend, if you think that, you err. The judge would have told the jury that Plantagenet was the man in possession, and that they were bound to presume that the man in possession was right, and the claimant wrong."

"Then," exclaimed Robert, "he'd be a rogue or a fool!"

"You bet," sounded a nasal voice at his elbow.

"Judge Potterer!" cried Captain Dolopy, advancing to greet that functionary with open arms.

A more injudicial-looking personage Robert thought it would be impossible to conceive. His visage was preternaturally long and thin, with no visible hair on it; his figure tall and slight; his trousers nearly up to his knees. He carried no expression at all on his face save when his eye twinkled for less than half a second. He was not melancholy; he was not jolly; he was not anything in particular except utterly indifferent.

"That gentleman," he remarked, "is right—your British judges are not smart. Guess we could teach 'em the inside of a verdict. Let's liquor."

Horace passed him the champagne. They stuck to that most costly of nectareous substances regardless of expense—perhaps to punish Sir Robert.

"No," said the judge. "That wouldn't take the skin off a fly. Here, you nigger, an eye-opener of pulque, all round."

"Yes, sare."

The eye-opener was produced, and handed round by the negresque Mercury in attendance.

"What d'ye call it?" asked Horace, after a dubious sip.

"Pulque," cried Dolopy. "It's distilled from that noble succulent, the agave. Your health, judge."

"I drink to you, Britishers," responded that limb of the law, flooring his modicum rapidly, an example followed by all except Robert, who, having tasted the stuff, made a wry face and set it down on the table as unfit for the human stomach.

Judge Potterer winked—funnily, so Robert thought, considering the dignity attaching to his high office.

He might well do so. Pulque is the most intoxicating fluid yet invented by diabolical art. It goes straight to the brain, and causes—not intoxication, but temporary insanity.

The judge himself, having, by long practice, tanned his vitals to the consistency of prunella, was able to swallow this filth without peril of dementia: indeed, it had no effect on him further than to evolve a tear from the corner of his pea-sized eye. But it rapidly converted Dolopy and Horace St. Vincent into a pair of raging, roaring lunatics. They smashed the glasses and chairs, flung everything at everybody, and eventually had to be forcibly restrained and put to bed by a posse of stalwart negroes.

"Wall," said the judge to Robert, after this singular episode, "the Britishers have imbibed—some. It's a fine evening. Shall I show you, sir, the sights of San Francisco? I reckon you could put London and Paris in the center of our town, sir, and forget all about them."

Robert acquiescing, they strolled out together.

"I guess, sir," commenced Judge Potterer, "that you've not been in our country before?"

"I haven't," replied Robert, "but I've wished to for some time past."

"It's a re—markably fine country, sir: a revelation to the mind of a Britisher, I reckon?"

Robert nodded his approval of this sentiment.

"Air you on business or pleasure, sir?"

"Not on business," answered the other, carelessly.

"Is that so? Then Captain Dolopy hasn't brought you here to buy?"

"I haven't the money to buy anything in particular. I may have some day, if I live."

"Just so, sir. Then I presume you've got what I may call a re—versionary interest? Perhaps now you're a relation of Dolopy?"

"No, no!" answered Robert, rather bluntly, for he was rather disposed to resent this system of catechizing. "Captain Dolopy's a stranger to me. I only know him through the gentleman I am traveling with, Mr. St. Vincent."

"Is that so? Wall, sir, and what's your candid opinion of Captain Dolopy?"

"I—I don't know," stammered Robert; "I haven't formed any opinion of him. He's not my sort."

Judge Potterer paused, and looked him full in the face.

"You're a Britisher," he said; "but you'll excuse me, there's the making of an American citizen in you. You don't talk as if you were an almighty mountain above the rest of the world. But you don't know much—yet."

To this philosophizing there was nothing to be said, so Robert, at all times the reverse of a chatterbox, walked on in silence, staring about him right and left.

"My name is Potterer—Judge Potterer."

"So I supposed," observed Robert. "My companions were talking about you and your gold-mine before you came."

"And what's your name, sir?"

Robert smiled as he replied, "Marmyon—Robert Marmyon."

"Is that so? And you have a re—versionary interest, I think you said."

"Oh, yes, if I choose to avail myself of it. To tell the truth, I'm undecided. I did intend to abandon the old country altogether and come across here to work for my living, but—"

"You've altered your mind, I guess."

"I don't know about that. All depends—on circumstances."

"Wall, sir: if you should think about a location, I should be willing to assist you to obtain one. Is mining at all in your line? You're of a strongish build, though not oversized."

"I'd prefer farming."

"A cattle ranch in Texas? Wall, sir, I'll sell you that, you bet."

"But," responded Robert, "I told you I've no money."

"You did so, sir. But perhaps that's of little consequence. A reversion is as good as dollars down."

Robert shrugged his shoulders.

"Or this," added Judge Potterer: "if you'll buy my gold-mine

slick from me, without Dolopy or anybody else interfering, I'll throw in the ranch."

"It's nonsense talking about it," protested Robert; "I've no means of raising money out here, and I would not borrow if I could."

"You air independent, sir—some."

"Yes. I'm a laboring-man. I can earn what I eat."

"Is that so? I thought you said just now you had a big reversion in prospect?"

"Oh, yes, I have. But I'm a laborer, and I like laborers, and I hate gentlemen. I've been tarred, judge, with the brush of honest toil, and you can't wash the marks off me. I know that."

"And who, sir, may your father be—if it is from him that you have expectations?"

"Sir Robert Marmyon."

Judge Potterer's eyes flashed fire. "I conclude, sir," he said, in a tone of rather cringing deference, for the sound of the handle to Sir Robert's patronymic had fascinated him as it does very many of his compatriots, "that your father is tarnation rich?"

"So they say. He is a large land-owner."

"And the property is entailed. Is that so, sir?"

"Yes."

"Then, Mr. Marmyon, it gives me the greatest pleasure to make your acquaintance. You have come, sir, to a country where we have no artificial distinctions between man and man; where every tub stands on its own bottom. We air an appreciative people, sir, and you will find yourself appreciated by us. We value a man for what he is—narry else."

Robert looked surprised, too much to gorge this soft-sawder. But he replied, quietly:

"What I want to know particularly is how a laboring man gets on in this country. I mean a man who earns a weekly wage, as we do in England."

"Why, certainly. Wall, yer better judge for yourself. There's no class of men out here earn more or live easier than the miners. Three days' work to three days' drink, and Sunday for a bully. They're a very smart lot, are the miners in my employ, sir. You shall see them to-morrow."

"That will suit me well," replied Robert. "I'm right down tired, I am, of rubbing shoulders with gentlemen. They ain't of my kidney, judge. A day or two with my fellows would do me a power of good, and if it wasn't for the heat of this climate I should relish a half-day with a pick."

Judge Potterer almost hazarded a laugh. It was many years since he had done anything of the sort, but the notion of a gentleman preferring positive labor to luxury struck him as being so ludicrously paradoxical that he found some little difficulty in keeping his countenance. He did so, however.

"Sir," he rejoined, "you are gifted with the soul of a citizen. We will liquor, sir, and return to the hotel. To-morrow we start early for Jeffsville, and shall, I trust, reach our location at the mine by the evening. After you, Mr. Marmyon."

L'homme propose. The next morning it would have been difficult

indeed to decide which of the maniacs of the previous evening was the greater corpse. Both were well-nigh blind, speechless, and more or less epileptic. Of all poisons the art of man has as yet succeeded in extracting from a harmless vegetable substance, pulque for destructiveness bears the palm. It begins by turning the sanest of mortals into infuriated lunatics, and when the mad fit has been slept off the body is left in a condition of disorganization quite perilous to all except the strongest constitutions; and yet, just as people may accustom themselves to swallow arsenic, until at last they can with impunity swallow a dose that would be fatal to an ordinary man, so the habitual bibbers of pulque, if they keep within their maximum, can partake with impunity. Thus while Judge Potterer put away his jorum of this treacherous beverage, and was subsequently if none the better, most assuredly none the worse, Mr. St. Vincent and Dolopy suffered untold agonies for their indiscretion.

No amount of persuasion could induce either of these men, in the very hey-day of their life, to move a peg. Both appealed piteously to be left alone to a burning head, a trembling frame, and such nausea as the experienced only know.

"'Twill take a week to bring them to," murmured the judge, more than half ashamed of what was intended by him as a practical joke. "Guess I'll track as far as the mine and back again. Air you disposed to come with me, Mr. Marmyon?"

Robert was disposed—very. But he thought it would be only civil to inform Horace St. Vincent of the judge's proposal. The response he received was a request to go anywhere and stop there, from which Robert argued, by no means irrationally, that pedigree is not the source of politeness. If Horace had been the prickliest agave out of which that seductive fluid was decocted, he could not have exhibited a rougher exterior. His manner had changed in a few short hours from the saccharine, oleaginous, and jovial to the bitter, the rough, and the miserable—*Telle est la pulque!*

Robert, therefore, and the judge departed, leaving word that they might be expected to turn up again in the course of four or five days; and as soon as they were gone, Dolopy, like a prudent man, roused himself so far as to order the attendant negro to send for the local doctor.

Esculapius, in the guise of a respectable practitioner under the ægis of the Stars and Stripes, differs not very widely from his congener on the estate of the Duke of Westminster in the English metropolis. He is not, like the London doctor, a Scotchman, and his properties are more republican and less spick-and-span. He does not assume a frock-coat as an emblem of a faultless diagnosis, nor a chimney-pot hat as a symbol of superlative diplomas. He omits to ride in a pill-box, and occasionally chews and expectorates. But his instincts are the same, only smarter; and whereas Esculapius of London contents himself with vivisecting dogs under a license from a human home secretary, and Esculapius of Paris devotes his hours of leisure to the sublime sport of torturing horses as well as other animals, Esculapius of 'Frisco indulges in a loftier flight of cruelty. His subjects are—occasionally, of course—niggers, and the wonder is, considering that vivisection is affirmed to be the royal road to

physiological omniscience, that he has not long before this enlightened all *Euroap*, as he terms that inferior locality.

Dr. Ulysses A. Robb had had a large experience of pulque mania. He knew all its symptoms by heart, and his method of curing it might be deemed by an unenlightened European as slightly unprofessional. Enough that it was practical.

"Cal'clate," he muttered over the silent corpse of Captain Dolopy, "you've made a mistake. You may suppose that the national drink of the State of Mexico is milk-and-water, but it air an error to act upon that hypothesis—some!"

"Can't you give me something to cure this, ugh, sickness, sir, and this gug—ghastly headache?"

"Why, cert'nly, stranger. If you'll do as I tell you, you'll be alive in an hour, but it will be necessary after re-vival to produce something like intoxication. *Similia similibus curantur.*"

"Ugh! Don't talk of it," groaned Dolopy. "You don't know, doctor, how I long to be a teetotaler."

"Wall, sir, yes. After this bout don't let me stop you. But if you summon me as your professional adviser I must see you through."

Captain Dolopy had not the force to resist, so he swallowed a rather bitterish compound, capped it with a glass of cognac, and in five minutes opened his eyes on existence.

In the meantime Doctor Ulysses had been enjoying a regular tussle with Horace St. Vincent. That gentleman being naturally of a mercurial temperament had succumbed unutterably. His was, if possible, the worse case of the two, and when all the science of a Robb was brought to bear on it, the ungrateful wretch was provokingly inappreciative.

"If you'll be so very, very kind," he whispered, in the most musical of tenors—"so very, very, very kind, my dearest doctor, as to permit me to die in peace I will give you my blessing."

"You bet, sir. That's not my fee. As many of the other things as you may choose, so long as they're covered by dollars. Come, sir. This spirit is not worthy the descendant of the heroes of Bunker Hill. You must allow me to prescribe for you right away."

"Yes," gurgled Dolopy, entering the chamber of his companion. "The doctor's stuff has half cured me. Don't be a fool, Horace, he knows his book, depend upon it. Yours is not the first corpse he's galvanized. Look at me"

"I can't," groaned Horace. "My sight is gone, and I have got at least a dozen sonatas in perfect form ringing in my ears simultaneously. They're all in different keys, and are so arranged that while the scherzo of one is being played, so also is the andante of another, the adagio of a third—in fact, my dear fellow, the whole of the pianoforte music of Beethoven in a condensed form is being now performed by an army of vigorous pianists in the center of my brain. I never before realized the true meaning of the term discord."

"Bosh!" growled Dolopy. "Here, old man, your business is to get well. Swallow this tipple, or by George I'll cram it down your throat."

And he literally forced the medicine past the unwilling lips of Horace.

Dr. Ulysses A. Robb stood carelessly observing this maneuver. When it was accomplished he remarked, quietly, "In *haf* an hour, gentlemen, I hope to see you again. *Au revoir!*"

The *haf* was a whole hour, but it allowed the victims of Judge Potterer's joke to wash and dress. Both, however, *malgré* their ablutions, greeted him on his reappearance with the ghastliest of smiles.

"Well, Britishers," he cried, cheerily, "and what's your opinion of pulque?"

"Nympha pulcherrima," grunted Horace.

"Why, cert'nly. That's what you call a pun. Wall, now, to proceed with my patent five-dollar cure. Here, you nigger," addressing the chief Sambo of the hotel, "a nice salad, some capsicums, Chili vinegar, and a bottle of French brandy."

"I can't eat," protested Horace, miserably.

"Nor I," echoed Dolopy, with an air of disgust. But Doctor Ulysses did not condescend to argue. As soon as the exquisite salad of the southern spring-time put in an appearance, he forced each man to bite a mouthful with a fragment of capsicum. Little by little they began to pick, as a dog suffering from a surfeit. Then he administered doses of brandy, until at last he had the satisfaction of hearing them call for a slice of pie and commence a regular meal. After that he pocketed his ten dollars, and with a caution to them not to floor a second bottle of brandy, beat a retreat.

The cure was in truth magical. Captain Dolopy eat like a hungry ostrich, and after deglutition relapsed into one of those opiated cigars of the Southern States that would shake the world, if only it had a mouth to smoke it; while Horace, to while away the time, called for pen, ink, and paper, and indited his first love-letter to pretty Miss Ida Frankalmoign.

We will, if you please, peep over his shoulder and play spy. This is how he ran off:

"O sweet Miss Ida, many-fountained Ida, dearest Miss Ida, hear me ere I die! In case you should not be as well versed in your Tennyson as you ought to be, this is to assure you that I am not indulging in a flight of fancy on my own account. I told you, *cara mia*, that I would scribble when in the mood. The mood has been on me for the past twelve hours. It is the optative mood, the mood which makes absent lovers long for their idols. Shall I make my confession? That longing, to me, has assumed the awful form of fever heat. As I lay amid the fireflies last night, with the moon of the tropical sky shedding its effulgence round my couch, I thought and thought of my Ida till the blood burned in my veins, and my temples throbbed, and my tongue seemed parched and pallid. All through the livelong night your sweet image flitted before the retina of my eye, and so wild was my brain, so quick my pulse, that at daybreak they brought to my bedside—what a satire!—a doctor. You, dear one—and you alone—could cure the malady of the heart, but they, the people round me, knew it not. They prated of fever, but they lied. You remember the words of the German poetaster—name uncertain, it don't signify—to which Mendelssohn wedded his divine art? 'Ah! love is a sad affair, love without relief; men thus oft are killed with care, maidens die of grief'—the translation, I

suspect, murders the original. *Apropos*, your swain was in a state better imagined than described. He had had—to tell you a little secret—a love philtre, one of those subtle influences known only to the Mexican Indians. They call it 'pulque'—a pretty name, isn't it? *Altro*, I must not tempt Venus again! Her philtres give one delicious dreams, but they are quite too much for such an amalgam of fibers, nerves, and emotions as your devoted Horace.

"I'm not going to send you a budget of dry details. We—*i.e.*, Captain Dolopy, who by favor of Apollo happened mercifully to be crossing with us, the plowman and I—are infesting San Francisco. The plowman has levanted for the present, to my great relief, in order to witness the moral spectacle of some miners at work. Give a sheet of paper, Ida *mia*, the nicest of kisses, and send it me by return. You need not trouble to write. A kiss is enough. Adieu! Ever,

"HORACE.

"P.S.—If the plowman goes and gets himself into a scrape with those miners, don't blame me. My idea is to bring him home safe and sound, and then to obtain shelter for myself in the nearest workhouse. H."

CHAPTER XXXI.

"LABOR DOWN SOUTH."

LONG CAMP is one of those townships which seem to have grown in a night. Built of wood, and consisting of a group of irregular huts, it serves well enough to house the rough-and-ready miners who give their labor to capitalists of the Potterer type—men who, as that intelligent judge explained, divide life pretty evenly between work and drink. The hands on his set were, needless to add, by birth, of different nationalities, though one and all professed allegiance to the great Republic; but in practice the village perpetrated what may be termed autodichotomy—in plain English, it divided itself into two parts, five-sixths designating themselves Yankees, albeit they might be Germans or Cornishmen, the remaining sixth being Irish. German, English, Scotch, Welsh, Spaniards, and Americans born, somehow could assimilate together and live as comrades; but the unfortunate peculiarity of the Irish, here as elsewhere, was their inability to maintain harmonious relations with the others. They began by asserting themselves unduly, and ended by provoking the hostility of their fellow-workers. The result was that Long Camp village consisted of two hostile camps, existing on terms of mutual detestation.

When Robert arrived at this location—to adopt the terminology of the country—his first act was to buy at the store a suit of miners' integuments, and to substitute them for the more elegant raiment of Mr. Snip, of Bond Street, W. Having arrayed his limbs in this costume, with a hat that looked as though it had been constructed to cover the heads of the entire College of Cardinals, he felt himself again. David had thrown off the armor of Saul and his lungs were free. The man of the people had rejoined the ranks of the people,

and he positively laughed to think that for a brief space, at all events, he should cease to be a gentleman—a sham gentleman.

Judge Potterer may not, perhaps, have very largely appreciated this metamorphosis, but he did not pass any comment upon it, his main object being to interest Sir Robert Marmyon's heir in the mines nominally in his possession, whereof one only, that denominated "The Popsy," was in full work. The judge, in fact, never kept his eye off business, and when he saw, or thought he saw, a chance of its accruing, he followed the scent up with the dogged pertinacity of a sleuthhound.

At the same time he was quite the reverse of gratified when, after a day's inspection of the mines, Robert, who had tried his utmost to make friends with the hands, abandoned his society in the evening for that of these working-men. It was an odd and an abnormal proceeding for a quasi-gentleman—even so far down South.

"Wall," he remarked, *sotto voce*, as he perceived this young man of birth, if not of breeding, hobnobbing with fellows of whose antecedents he himself knew a little too much, "it will be a clean mercy if the Irish don't gouge him for a Britisher and the Yankees for an aristocrat. The man's a tarnation sentimentalist about the rights of labor."

As a matter-of-fact the worthy judge was a trifle at fault. Neither Yankees nor Irish are ever in too great a hurry to injure one whose hand dips readily into his pocket in order to provide gratis drink *ad lib.* Now Robert having money about him, and being moreover anxious to ingratiate himself with these merry miners, exhibited an almost reckless lavishness, and was soon rewarded by the obtrusive friendship of at least a dozen of them, including notably the spokesman of the Irishry, Pat Frayney, and the bully of the opposite party, Billy Benito, a gentleman who spoke all languages fluently, and might have been Spanish or Cornish, but whose local reputation was based on certain exploits which, in a more advanced condition of civilization, would have placed a halter round his neck, not quite undeservedly.

Both these fellows, and their mates to boot, were in fact the rowdiest of rowdies, and would have handled Robert unmercifully but for his purse. That for the nonce converted them into toadies, whose flunkyism was carefully veiled under a cloak of independence.

"I should advise you, sir," remarked Billy Benito, "to give that Irish lot a wide birth—at least if you wish to fit our people. We air men of liberal sentiments, sir, and we don't mean to tolerate that lot much longer. That's it, sir!"

"Why not?" asked Robert. "Frayney seems to me a clever intelligent fellow, and there's any amount of work in these Irishmen."

"That is so, sir. But this is a free country, sir, and we work as we like, and with the men we like. We don't like these Irishmen, sir, and that's it!"

"But," pleaded Robert, "on the system you have here, every man's his own master. You pay yourselves, you ain't paid as we are in the old country. Now, that being so, why should you interfere with men who don't interfere with you?"

"Wall, Britisher, if you ask me why, 'tis because this land's almighty free. *That's it!*"

"And you are free to act as you choose, justly or unjustly, rightly or wrongly. Is that your idea?"

"You bet, stranger. That's it!"

"But how do you expect, on those lines, people to pull together?"

Mr. Billy Benito smiled. "We just don't," he responded. "We just make 'em pull our way. *That's it!*"

"And suppose they won't? Frayney, for instance, seems to be rather hot because his men are not allowed to work on some placer —I forget the name?"

"Is that so?"

"Well. I don't want to make mischief, but from the way he spoke just now I gathered that he was smarting under a sense of injustice."

"You are in error, Britisher. The Irish people never feel an injustice. What riles 'em up is their imaginations. You go, sir, and hurt an Irishman—put half his light out, burn his location over his head, take the dollars out of his pocket; do you think, sir, he'll love you the worse for it? No, sir, he will not. He will respect you for that same, sir. But, sir, if any cuss of an editor of a newspaper, or some loafer with a long tongue, tells an Irishman that you've insulted him, or robbed his ancestor a thousand years ago, though you might be his best friend, he'd go for your throat. *That's it!*"

"Absurd!" ejaculated Robert, impatiently.

"What's that you say?" observed Benito, the dark olive of his complexion suddenly reddening.

"I say you're wrong in your estimate of the Irish. It doesn't stand to reason that any nation gifted with common-sense should act so."

"That's it, sir."

"And especially a warm-hearted, generous race."

"You bet, Britisher. And you may try them if you will. Perhaps I'm wrong. Perhaps I don't know my book. I wish you good evening, stranger."

They had been standing in the angle of a drinking-saloon, and as Mr. Billy Benito retired, evidently in a huff, Robert—perhaps to show his independence—advanced toward Pat Frayney, who was talking loudly to some four or five of his compatriots hard by. If he had chanced to gaze after the retiring form of the man he had offended, he might have perceived the unwisdom of this maneuver, for Benito, as he passed out of the long shed devoted to Bacchus, cast a glance over his shoulder, and his expression when he perceived the young fellow in close conference with his Irish rival was much the reverse of amiable. In fact, the rowdy muttered a curse of the sort that goes out to roost; and men thereabouts would tell you that Benito, who, unlike most men of his type, seldom employed expletives, when he did curse never cursed in vain.

Frayney Robert found just as voluble as Benito had been reticent. It is rather the habit of the Irish to thunder loud before they lighten —in fact the lightning more often than not has its origin in a vain desire to apologize for the noise of the previous thunder.

"Oi'm proud, sorr," he said, after flooring a dollar's worth of Robert's liquor, "to enjoy the comp'ny of a rale gintleman. Me ancesthors, sorr, was the ancient kings of Oireland, and the family

estates extended over a matther of siv'n counties. The toitle-dades, sorr, are in the possession of me forther, and he—to the aytornal disgrace of the ould faymale that resides at Windsor Castle, sorr—he, the man, sorr, that ought by roights to be the Imperor of the Oirish Republic, sorr, inhabits a mud cab'n on the roadsoide. But the toitle-dades are in his sacred possession, sorr, and be this and be that, the toime will come when the Frayneys will wield the scepthre from say to say, and put their foot on the humbled Saxon."

"Yes," replied Robert, dryly. "I've got a pedigree, too, I believe, and my father has any amount of title-deeds; but, Mr. Frayney, the only pedigree I believe in is a record of labor done for the world, and the only title-deed is honest industry."

"A very purty sentiment, me dear sorr, but h'wat would become of your labor, sure, and your industhry, sorr, if ye happened to be one of us?"

"Well, I suppose I should meet with fair-play, or, if not, I fancy I could take care of myself."

"Bedad, sorr, thrue for you. And"—in a stage whisper—"that away's the oidintical thrick we chaps mane to play. There's justice, sorr, in Long Camp, for anny nation or payple or language, except 'tis won, and that won's the won, sorr, that boasts the blood of the Frayneys."

"Indeed!"

"It's the thruth Oi'm tellin' ye, sorr. If there's a placer in his location as is known to contain the stuff, sorr, the Oirish gintleman is ordthered off it; and if there's a bit of quartz widout a strake of gould in it, that's good enough for the loikes of us. It's the prejudice, sorr, that has been imported across the broad sorface of the say agin the greatest nation in the worruld. But, sorr, be this and be that, and be the other into the bargain, sorr, the mom'nt's arrived h'wen the b'hoys manes to purtict thimsilves. Oi'm just waitin', sorr, for a few days to give them a last chance, and then, be jabers, if they porsist in their opposition to the best and bravest moiners in the worruld and the Unoited Sates of America, it will be moy duty, sorr, as the chayfe of the Oirish sittlement in this location, to sorve a formil notice on the felly they calls Benito—though sure that's not his forther's name Oi'll be bound—as the layder of the other side, sure."

"A notice? What good will that do?"

"Moighty little. It's not worruds that breaks heads; it's dades. Our programme, sorr, will be to take our revinge, loike gintlemen, and thin depart in payce."

"But," suggested Robert "if you are in the right can't the difference be settled by arbitration?"

"Bedad, no; and ye think now that we'd be arbithrated upon? Not h'woile there's a bull't or a knoife to be handled. In all disputes the only just judge is the plaintiff when you're that party, sorr, and h'wen you're not, then the defendant, sure. Give your own vordict, man, in your own case, and ye'll never be in the wrong."

"Well," laughed Robert, "that's one way of looking at it, and a practicable one if you happen to be the stronger of the two; but what if you are the weaker?"

"Thrust the b'hoys for that! The wayker, sorr, is the felly that sthroikes the siccind blow. Give me the furrust shot, and whe'ew!"

"No," rejoined Robert, "I don't agree to that. If you have justice on your side, and you can't get your opponent to hear you, then let a third, and an unbiased person, plead your cause."

"Git away wid yer blather, sorr. We nivir playde; we putts forward our demand wonce in a worrud, twoice in a worrud, and the thord toime wid the porsuasive el'quence of a six-chambered revolver."

"And you gain a verdict by bullet?"

"Thrue for you, sorr."

"Or else the other fellows gain it, eh?"

"That's as't may be."

"Quite so. And where you're outnumbered in the proportion of ten to one, the odds must be dead against you, even if you do get the first shot. Suppose now that I, a total stranger, were to try and pull matters round? Would that suit your book? Because I don't mind the job."

Mr. Frayney regarded him with amazement. "Ye may thry, sorr," he replied, "and welcome, but, bedad, if ye was to succade, Oi'd ate me ould leather breeches, I would."

Robert smiled proudly. "I'll sleep over it," he said, in a tone of quiet confidence. "You see, Mr. Frayney, I happen to be a great believer in labor. It makes a man of a man, and he who is a man is open to reason—or ought to be."

And Pat Frayney did not care to contradict him.

It had been the intention of Robert during the progress of this dialogue to constitute himself amateur arbitrator, but as Frayney developed his game he perceived the unwisdom of acting on impulse. Indeed he mentally decided to consult Judge Potterer. That worthy knew the geography of the country and the instincts of its inhabitants.

"Guess you'll get it right and left, Britisher," said that limb of the law in response to his query. "They make coffins at the store almighty slick, but you can be measured before commencing that business; you'll want that fixin', sir."

"I'm not afraid of that," answered Robert. "Neither side would care to injure me. They both know my motive, and can appreciate it."

"Why, cert'nly."

"And you don't tell me they'd be so dastardly as to punish the umpire? I won't believe that of any body of working-men, whatever be their nationality."

"I am not requesting you, stranger, to believe me. You can make a trial of which is in the right, but I should prefer, sir, that you put off that experiment till your friends appear on this scene. They might blame me."

"Then you really think that an arbitrator in this country runs a heavy risk?"

"No, Britisher, I do not think so."

"But you said as much this very moment!"

"Why, certainly. But I do not think so; I know it."

"Oh!" ejaculated Robert, petulantly. "And you're anxious

that I should take no steps to further the views of Frayney till such time as Mr. St. Vincent puts in an appearance here?"

"That is so, Mr. Marmyon. You haven't had my experience of California mining. There is much in the ramifications of that business to surprise a Britisher. For instance, you have seen my set on the quartz—I call it 'The Popsy,' but it goes by a dozen names. Wall, sir, on the dumps there is ore to the extent of a quarter of a million dollars. I shall sell that mine, sir, and the purchaser after the transfer will be authorized to remove that ore. He will buy on these conditions, sir, but he will be undeceived sooner or later."

"How? If the man buys the ore, it stands to reason he will take it away. It is his."

"Just so. You bet."

"Then what in the name of conscience stops the way?"

"Wall, sir, this is a free country. As soon as he showed signs of appropriating that ore, he would receive a notice—a caveat, sir. And if he neglected that, sir, the mine would be blown up and he along with it if he was on the spot by any chance. You see, sir, this is a free country."

"In that case what right have you, judge, to sell the mine with the ore on the bank?"

"Wall, sir; my title-deeds are duly registered and attested. I am owner of that property, sir, including the ore. If the purchaser is smart he will make no mistake. And if he's not, I cannot supply his mental deficiency, sir."

Robert would argue no further. Slowly it began to dawn upon his intelligence that down South the standard of moral rectitude varied considerably from that of the decalogue. Still he cherished a secret belief in the latent honor of the men of labor, and though he acquiesced in Judge Potterer's suggestion to postpone his offer of arbitration till the advent of Horace, he none the less strove to cultivate amicable relations with Benito, who seemed rather stand-off, and Frayney, who was much the reverse. He tried, too, his hand with a pick and made himself the comrade of all indifferently. Indeed, before the week was out he had gained a sort of surface popularity, though he failed to perceive that they voted him rather an eccentric if not as a man of weakish intellect.

At the end of the week there arrived from Captain Dolopy a brief missive to the effect that neither he nor Horace had quite recovered, and they did not propose coming to Long Camp just yet.

Judge Potterer on receipt of this expectorated rather freely, his only sign of emotion.

"Darn their business," he muttered, testily.

"What's the matter?" asked Robert, innocently, adding, "Why don't they turn up?"

"The matter, sir," repeated the judge, again expectorating, "you may spell with a big B and end with an 'r.' That's their business, sir."

"I don't understand."

"We call it baccarat, sir, in the country," replied the judge.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DIVERSITY OF MORAL SENTIMENT.

It was a whole fortnight before those amiable Arcadians, Captain Dolopy and Horace St. Vincent, condescended to appear in Long Camp, and when they did show, Robert fancied that they looked preternaturally grave; certainly they were given to much private whispering and sundry confidences of the mysterious sort with Judge Potterer. The fact was, and it need not be concealed, that these gentlemen had fallen in accidentally with some very agreeable, not to say lubricous society in San Francisco, and had also, to amuse themselves and their new friends, indulged in unlimited gambling. The result may be easily anticipated. Both men were cleared out, Dolopy of his apocryphal securities, Horace of the large sum in circular notes which Sir Robert Marmyon had intrusted to him for the costs and charges of the long tour. Judge Potterer, with his Yankee acumen, had shrewdly guessed what they were about, and the true reason for their non-appearance.

On the morrow after they came—it was on the top of much surreptitious chattering of a suspicious kind—Horace remarked casually, but in a sort of tone of command, "By the bye, Marmyon, I shall want you to sign this small document."

Robert looked at him in surprise, a sentiment considerably heightened when he perceived that the document in question was a bill of exchange.

"I don't understand," he replied, coldly.

"It's nothing," laughed Horace, turning to Dolopy, who joined in the forced giggle. "Nothing—a mere form, but you will kindly write your name where I have marked it in pencil."

Robert's face flushed. Horace had with cool assurance placed the document under his nose, together with a pen and ink. He took it up and read it over. It was an engagement to pay within six months the sum of one hundred thousand dollars.

"What do you take me for?" he demanded, in a stern and angry tone.

Horace was about to reply in his usual vein of impertinence, when Dolopy cut in—

"We wished you, Mr. Marmyon, to oblige us so far," he said. "But, of course, if you'd rather not, why then, Horace," turning to his friend, "it really is of no consequence. I can sign."

And he drew away the document and sitting down to the table scribbled hurriedly across it. Whereupon Horace burst out laughing, scornfully. At that instant—perchance it was in response to a signal—the judge entered, and Horace hastily handed him the bill with the remark, "It's all right. I am witness to the signature."

A thought flashed across Robert's brain. With the quickness of desperation he walked up to the judge and snatched the bill out of his unsuspecting hand; then perceiving that Dolopy had forged his name, he tore it to ribbons, and flung it in the rogue's face.

To his indignation all three joined in one long guffaw. They were confederates—possibly.

"You are very clever, Mr. Marmyon, very," remarked Horace. "But you have only cost us the price of a bill-stamp. That is all. Next time we shall not require your presence when we draw up a bill for acceptance. Shall we, Dolopy?"

"Too expensive," roared that gentleman—"quite too—too—"

"I shall take my own course," rejoined Robert, feeling himself driven to bay. "And it will be one that you, Mr. St. Vincent, may regret."

Horace was about to hazard a rejoinder, but Robert abruptly left them, neither did he return, taking up his quarters in fact with Pat Frayney, with whom he had established relations approximating to intimate friendship.

"Wall," remarked Judge Potterer, "that cuss is fly, sirs. He may be a infant, but his vision is not quite limited to this side of a stone wall."

"It does not signify one little bit," replied Dolopy, rather nervously. "I can sign the fool's name, and Horace can swear to it. That's good enough, judge, isn't it, to raise the dollars on?"

The judge, however, though he had joined in their laugh because of Robert's wrath at their attempted trickery, was evidently indisposed to fall in with the wily project of the gay captain.

"Wall," he replied, "you may buy your dollars just a cent too dear. I was willing, in order to oblige you, gentlemen, and in consideration of your obtaining for me the signature of the heir to this big location you talk about over in the old country—I was willing, you bet, to get the paper discounted at a deduction of fifty per cent., and to make what I could out of the transaction. But, gentlemen, I can't afford to run a bit of bogus paper, knowing it to be bogus, and with the certainty of ultimate detection. That would be smart—some, but not my line of business."

"I see," responded Horace, "you're nervous, lest when this bill came to maturity, it should not be dishonored, but repudiated."

"That is so—just so."

"Then, perhaps, you've got up a scare about nothing. Who knows that fellow's signature from Adam?"

"Some cuss or other, I guess."

"You are wrong—nobody. You don't comprehend his past history. He was a common day-laborer on his father's estate. I don't suppose he ever had occasion to sign his name. He certainly never writes a line home to a soul, and, of course, when he lived at Marmyon, he never had occasion to put pen to paper. I question whether his autograph exists in the world, and as for its being discovered by a 'Frisco discounter, that's too ridiculous to be talked about."

But Judge Potterer did not seem convinced, though he took refuge in silence—and expectoration.

"Don't you agree with Horace?" asked Dolopy, after a prolonged pause.

"Why, cert'nly."

"Then where's the difficulty? Out with it, old man!"

"The difficulty," replied the judge, "is this. You people are

ready to run any risks to collar the pieces. You will forge Marmyon's name kerslap, and expect him to pay up without putting a question, or flashing an objection. And you do this after having given the man notice of what you mean. You may think he don't write, and won't write. Is that so? You bet, he'll write the whole tale by next mail right away to Sir Robert Marymon."

Horace winced.

"Will he?" cried Dolopy. "Not if I know it, my boy!"

"Wall—suppose he don't? Suppose he's too careless or too shy? The bill will have, notwithstanding, to be met. 'Frisco men don't drop their dollars easily, I may tell you, sirs; and they will wire across to their agents in London, who will apply for payment slick. Then the whole darned balloon will go bust, and when Marmyon comes to sign his fist, they'll mortal quick tell the difference between another man's autograph of his name and his own autograph of his own name."

"Quite so," observed Horace. Now we're coming to the point. You have ingeniously invented, judge, a complete series of hypotheses, any one of which upsets my conclusion. But you have omitted one, and that one by far the most important of all. Suppose Robert Marmyon does not go back at all to England? Eh, my sapient friend?"

"Wall, sir. Then he will stop in the States, and the 'Frisco men will find him. They'd find him, sir, I pledge you the word of a citizen, anywhere on the surface of this planet, on the top of Chimborazo, or in the middle of the Desert of Sahara."

"Quite so," laughed Horace. "Those 'Frisco blood-suckers have tentacles like an octopus. But—candidly—judge, do you think they can stretch as far as six foot underground?"

"Golly!" ejaculated Judge Potterer, his eyes suddenly opening. "You are the smartest Britisher I have had the pleasure of meeting on this side."

"Accidents will happen," chimed in Captain Dolopy, "and accidents must—when it's convenient."

"You are right, sir," rejoined the judge, "and I appeciate the morality of your intentions. But—you will pardon me it I make a calc'lation. It is this, sir. You offer as a security the name of a gentleman who when the bill comes to maturity will not be alive to meet it. Is that so?"

"Yes, judge. That is precisely what I do mean."

"Then, sir, it is my duty, as a professional jurist of the U—nited States, to inform you that your proposition's not good enough."

"What more do you require, judge?"

"A certificate of the decease of the party who purports to sign the document. You tell me he will encounter a fatal accident. Your word, gentlemen, is as good as your bond. But it might happen that the 'coon bolted. What then?"

"Oh, that's absurd!" interposed Horace—"he's no 'coon."

"As a lawyer who has hanged a hundred men at least for the crime of murder," rejoined Judge Potterer, with quiet emphasis, "I am bound to make my security good. It's almighty easy to sign any name across a bit of stamped paper, but it's plaguy on-easy to put a bullet into a man's waistcoat without being swung for it,

more particularly down South, where there's no jury to protect a gentleman, you bet."

"In plain English," rejoined Dolopy, rather indignantly, "you don't see your way to cashing a bill till—"

"Till the light's out of the nominal acceptor. That is so, sir."

"Then," remarked Horace, "there's no time to be lost, for we're both of us as dry as boards."

"Wall," remarked Judge Potterer, diffidently, "that's bad business. But, gentlemen, I should be sorry if you were to spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar. You seem inclined, if you'll excuse the liberty I take in *commenting* on your suggestion, to be in a mortal hurry. That's a mistake. In all affairs of delicacy, sir—whether it's women or war—never you be precipitate. That cuss, Marmyon, will not require any assistance from you gentlemen to remove him from active participation in the affairs of this planet. He is engaged at present in putting himself between the Yankees and the Irish at Long Camp village, and, you bet, between these two stools he will fall to the ground of his own accord. However, as you can't afford to play a waitin' game very long, if you will travel with me, gentlemen, as far as the city of San Francisco, I will find you a man to discount your bill for a small sum—say five hundred dollars—if that will serve your present purpose."

"Hear him!" laughed Horace, gayly. "This is splendid!"

"The perfection of ingenuity," echoed Dolopy, adding, "Judge, your brain is that of a Lord Chancellor."

The judge smiled and the bargain was struck.

That same evening Robert encountered Billy Benito, and invited him to drink. Whether it was the warmth or the *genius loci*, or any other cause, certain it is that the young Kentishman had broken his old rule of abstinence. He was not intemperate, only rather free, and the incessant tobacco caused him to relish his iced drink in the evening. Consequently he never lacked company, and the rollicking independence of men, who were not only Republicans, but in a way anarchists, harmonized with his ideas. He would rather, as a matter of choice, have spent the rest of his life with a pick among the miners than as a baronet in the more responsible and exalted position of lord of all Marmyon.

"Guess, stranger, you're alone here?" remarked Mr. Benito, after performing an act of suction at his expense with supreme dignity.

"Yes. I'm to myself. But you workingmen are my friends, you know, and right down good company you are. Here's toward you!"

"We are equals, stranger, in this country," rejoined Benito, dryly. "I conclude now that your friends do not appreciate equality much."

"I don't know anything about them," retorted Robert.

"Why, certainly. You have split, I reckon. And they have made tracks right away for 'Frisco."

"Eh, what?"

"Wall, don't you know? Judge Potterer, and those Europeans you were mating with, have cleared out. That's it!"

Robert said nothing, but his face paled. The thought flashed

across him that they had stolen off to San Francisco in order to make use of his name on a bill, and his features hardened.

"You look upset—some," observed Benito, curiously.

"Nothing, nothing. Let us change the subject. I was about to ask for a ten minutes' talk with you on a matter of business. That's all."

"Wall, yes, sir," replied the other, in a tone of surprise.

"But," continued Robert, "now will do as well as any other time. Have a drink, friend?"

"I will so, sir, if you will join me in that same."

Tis preliminary settled, Robert proceeded.

"The fact is, as a man of leisure who has come out to see the world, I'm ready always to give any one of my brethren in labor a helping hand."

"You are right, stranger," rejoined Benito. "I saw you handle a pick, and you showed yourself a workman kerslap. That's it."

"I don't mean that. That's mere play. No, what I am driving at is different. My wish is, wherever I may chance to be, whether 'tis in England or America, or anywhere else, to try all I know to promote union among those who labor. Union, you know, Mr. Benito, is strength."

"That is so, and I guess we're almighty strong here."

"In one sense you are; in another not. You're not all united, you see. There's the mischief."

"Yes, sir, we are. We are united, every man of us."

"Except," pleaded Robert, "a small knot of Irishmen, whom you send to Coventry."

"Is that so?"

"Well, is it not? Arn't you on the worst of terms with Pat Frayney and his friends?"

"No, sir, we are not. Frayney and that lot are on bad terms with us, and it may be necessary, if they interfere, to wipe them out altogether."

"How so?"

"Wall, sir, you and a rat may live comfortably in the same cabin. But if the rat gnaws your nose when you're asleep, or kicks up a splutter when you're awake, you kill that rat, sir."

"Just so. But the Irish are not exactly rats."

"They are not, sir—exactly. They are inferior—some, to that harmless vermin—you bet."

Robert opened his eyes. Here was an evidence indeed of malice—not to say viciousness. "Come, come," he cried, "it won't do to call Pat these names. He is a good fellow in his way, with an ugly temper, if you put him out, and a jolly one if you don't. Now what I wanted to beg as a favor was that you'd allow me to be arbitrator between you and the Irish here. There's a mutual misunderstanding which ought to be cleared up."

Mr. Billy Benito, however, did not relish this. He started back, and his manner suddenly changed from servile deference to insolence and aggression.

"Sir," he said, looking Robert up and down, "you are not accustomed to our people, or you'd never dream of this interfering.

We are a body of men, sir, that cannot stomach anybody intruding on our business—least of all a Britisher. That's it."

"No offense, I trust?"

"Wall, sir: that must depend. You have been observed, sir, colloquing with Frayney. We are a free people in this country, sir, and your association with men, that will cause us trouble and bloodshed before they are wiped off finally, is not pleasing to a free people. It mayn't be my business, sir, to thrust advice on a stranger, but, as you come from a land that is swathed in the fetters of aristocracy, and don't yet know the A B C of liberty, I'll give you for once only the straight tip."

"And that is—"

"That a free people, stranger, air not prepared to much tolerate the presence of vermin for almighty ever. Now, sir! And—I wish you a good-evening."

Robert, in whose temperament, in spite of his natural realism and matter-of-fact speech, existed an admixture of romance, felt dashed at this speech. He had dreamed a dream of forcing Benito and Frayney to shake hands, and he now perceived it was but a dream and not capable of realization. In silence, therefore, he returned to Frayney's location, as he termed it—*i.e.*, timber-house—and retired to rest in full consciousness of a bitter disappointment.

He dreamed too. Not, however, of himself playing special providence to the rival camps of Yankees and Irish. He dreamed that he was at Marmyon again, in the presence of Sir Robert, who sternly demanded what right he had to sign a bill for so large a sum as a hundred thousand dollars, and that when he denied the signature, and loudly protested it was a forgery, Captain Dolopy and Horace St. Vincent shouted him down with accusations of lying and swindling.

This vision of the night had its effect. The next morning he arose at daybreak, and by the first train traveled post-haste to San Francisco, resolved, if he could, to stop the mischief he both suspected, and, in truth, had some grounds for suspecting.

He arrived in 'Frisco in the afternoon, and went straight to Burlbec's Hotel. On the steps there met him—not, indeed, his companions, but the nigger waiter.

"Golly, sare," cried that functionary, "there am a letter for you."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"POOR PRIMROSE."

THE letter may be termed in its way a curiosity, for its cacography might have puzzled an expert. The address was as follows:

"To Mister Robert Marmyon, or Hodge, Asquire,
"At the Burlbecks Hotel,
"Sans Frankisko,
"In Amerikv."

(The postage-stamps bore the image and superscription of Queen Victoria, and the postmarks were Marmyon, Kent, and London, over and above those of the Great Republic.)

Robert Hodge opened the envelope hastily, and read with difficulty a scrawl to this effect:

"This be to warn you that you be sent to foreign parts to be doned away with. Him as is with you as your fren mean mischief. Give he the slip and come back when you can, or you will never come back no more. This is truth. A FREN.

"From Marmyon Court, in the County of Kent."

Robert looked to the heading. There sure enough was stamped on ivory paper the familiar coat of arms of the family, with the address below in blue type. Who could have sent this missive? Not Polly. He never thought of her, deeming it utterly impossible that she could get hold of a scrap of that pretentious heraldic paper—in fact he crumpled it up hastily and consigned it to his pocket. Neither did the warning affect him at the moment otherwise than with curiosity as to the identity of the writer, who he imagined must have had some reason for wishing him to return to England. Indeed he suspected it to be a *ruse* on the part of Errol to involve him in a dispute with Sir Robert—in whom his confidence was not easily to be shaken.

He had not, however, as it happened, much time for puzzling his brain, inasmuch as to him advanced the tall and lean form of Judge Potterer.

"Wall, sir, so you have made tracks to this point?"

"I have come," replied Robert, none the less gravely, perhaps because of the warning he had received, "to try and prevent mischief. There is a plot against me, judge!"

Judge Potterer smiled sardonically as he volunteered his stereotyped response, "Is that so?"

"You know it; you know that those rogues who boast themselves to be gentlemen are trying to raise money on my forged signature. I should be glad to think that you were not their confederate. Anyhow I'm come to stop this little game, if I can."

Judge Potterer's visage elongated, if it be possible, but he shrugged his shoulders indifferentley as he asked, "How so?"

"I shall inquire of the police," said Robert, firmly and resolutely, "for the names of the discounters in this city, and I shall make it my business to call on them and administer timely warning."

The judge winced a little, but coolly replied, "Perhaps I can save you the trouble. I know every man of the lot."

"You know, I take it, who has been making advances to these men—your confederates? If so, take me to him and save your own skin."

"Why, certainly, right away. But you are wrong in supposing that these gentlemen have forged your name, or would be guilty of such an act. They have raised some dollars on their own bond. That is so. But when Dolopy signed your name across that bill he didn't mean it. 'Twas only a bit of harmless blatherumskite, and you took it serious."

Robert was staggered, but not convinced.

"Dolopy and St. Vincent," continued the judge, "have contracted a loan, and the lender is a personal friend of mine, Max Von Kopner. You can see him, if it is your pleasure, right away."

"And I understand that my name has not been misused—forged, I had better term it?"

"It has not, Mr. Marmyon. And I tell you, sir, that Dolopy's practical joke in signing your name was the act of a schoolboy; but it made us laugh some to see you take it in airnest, sir, and rile up kerslap. I am, sir, a judge of the United States, and you do not surely imagine that a judge, sir, is capable of complicity with the crime of forgery?"

"Well," replied Robert, "of course, if it was only chaff, I'm sorry I took it amiss; but it's the kind of joke to make a man of honor wild, isn't it?"

"Why, cert'nly."

"And I must say that when these men perceived that I did not treat it as such, but accredited them with outrageous rascality, they might have put matters straight for their own sake, if not for my satisfaction. I'm bound to take your word, judge, but, frankly, I don't like the looks of it. Dolopy has bared his hand to me without a blush, and St Vincent openly avows that he doesn't own a single principle. The trick, therefore, was not quite beyond their measure, if I am to judge them by their own words."

"Wall, sir, if you were, as I am, a judge of the United States, that is about the last criterion you would select to test any man by. My notion of my fellow-creatures, sir, is this: The cuss that chatters funks; and the cuss that acts holds his tongue Your friends, sir, consider themselves to be almighty smart, but they're small potatoes in this country. Dolopy, sir, in the city of London, England, may be some, but St. Vincent, sir, is not that, nor yet half of it, anywhere on the surface of this planet."

This depreciation of the men whom he could but regard with suspicion had a pacifying effect on a mind that naturally was too self-contained, not to say up in the clouds, to pay very close attention to the affairs of others. Robert, indeed, was about to drop the subject, when a sudden thought flashed across his brain, and found immediate expression in words.

"You mean to infer that Mr. Horace St. Vincent is a simple-minded gentleman—eh, judge? Then answer me this: Why and wherefore has it become necessary for that same simple-minded gentleman to borrow money? It is not so long since Sir Robert Marmyon intrusted him with a sum sufficient, so I heard him state, to pay our way round the globe. That sum cannot be exhausted by fair means. I do not know the precise amount, for I was not let into that secret, the bargain being that I was to be the pupil and not the master. But I'll dare to take my oath that your simple-minded sawney has embezzled my father's money—for what purpose you may know, I don't."

Judge Potterer smiled.

"Stranger," he replied, with paternal gentleness, "I do not pretend to be the boss of Mr. Horace St. Vincent, neither am I his wife, nor his doctor, nor his lawyer. I am in ignorance, sir, of that gentleman's secrets. But if you are dissatisfied, dissolve partnership. You seem to be hitched on to the man; hitch off and let drift."

"I'll have an explanation first," answered Robert.

Again Judge Potterer smiled, but this time he did not vouchsafe

either response or remonstrance. On the contrary, after a rather awkward pause, he passed the stereotyped remark, to fill up a hiatus in conversation, "Let's liquor."

"No, thank you."

"There is, Britisher, a fresh tap of real French champagne, just imported from Euroap to this location. If you will do me the honor, sir, I shall be glad of your opinion on the merits of that wine."

Robert would have reiterated his negative to any ordinary proposition in favor of fluid. This, however, sounded rather attractive. He had already developed an affection for sparkling wines, and his sensations at the moment were those of a hot, angered, and thirsty soul. Hence, without resistance, he suffered himself to be led away and liquored up then and there.

There was something so direct, so cool, yet so uniformly quiet in the manner of Judge Potterer, as quite to conceal the fact that he was a consummate actor. Robert, while he quaffed his really exquisite champagne, never dreamed for an instant that he was being played with like a stupid chubb with a hook in his mouth. Nor, indeed, was the hook painful, neither was the rod or the line visible. The judge, over his sparkling fluid, energized to be agreeable, developed a laugh, and became almost graphic in some of his descriptions of buffalo-hunting. Thus Robert, within a short half hour, became metamorphosed from gloom into joviality; and when Dolopy and St. Vincent entered the saloon of Burlbec's Hotel, each with the semblance of a forced laugh, he was caught grinning.

"Why, certainly," cried Judge Potterer before any one could utter, "here's a Britisher"—pointing with a sort of grim smile at Robert—"who can't take a joke. You will not believe me, Captain Dolopy, when I tell you, sir, that Mr. Robert Marmyon actually brought himself to believe that when you signed his name across that bill you meant it!"

"That's good!" gasped Dolopy, again hatching up an inane cackle. "Eh, Horace, what do *you* think?"

"Think!" laughed that gentleman. "Upon my honor, the idea surpasses thought. It's downright transcendental. Why, my good Marmyon, you never mean to tell me that you imagined our friend Dolopy was going to commit forgery?"

Robert, under the lubricous influence of champagne, could only smile sillily. "I don't know," he said, weakly."

"And what brought you here?" inquired Horace. "Why, we're all of us just off to Long Camp! Dolopy is going to collect his sack of samples and then to return home. Isn't that the programme, Dol, old man?"

"And you and I," observed Robert, "are to travel onward?"

"Yes."

"But what about the funds—the necessary money?"

Horace reddened, as he replied, evasively, "Oh, that's all right."

"Indeed?" hiccoughed Robert, with the same silly, champagney sort of smile enfeebling his expression.

"Of course, man. If more coin is required, I draw on Sir Robert. That's good enough, isn't it?"

"But I fancied he'd given you enough to last out all through—as much as he meant to give."

"Shut up, you stupid, suspicious idiot!" cried Horace, chaffily, patting him at the same time affectionately on the back. "Now, do you suppose I don't know my business? If Sir Robert objects to my drawing on him, depend upon it I shall hear about it quick enough."

Then they all laughed long and low, for Robert had no answer to give, and looked all the more foolish because of the stupefying effect of the champagne.

They were all four seated at a table in the large bay-window of the saloon facing the street; and as Robert found himself unexpectedly an object of derision, and was also in that sort of puzzled-brain state which is the outcome of one glass too much of sparkling wine, he leaned out of the window, partially turning his back on his companions.

As he did so, a tallish, powerful-looking fellow on the opposite side of the street, paused, stared, walked a little way on, turned round, walked back again, and all the while kept his eye fixed on Robert, who, to be truthful, had his orbits focused on nothing.

"Have a cigar, Marmyon?" said Captain Dolopy, touching his elbow, and causing him to start.

"Yes. Th—thank you. I'll smoke. It does one a power of good in this warm climate." And he bit off the end of the weed, and began hunting in his pockets for a light—to no purpose, apparently.

As he performed this maneuver, the letter with the Marmyon postmark fell on the table. Then, nervous in an instant lest it should attract the eye of the others, he clutched at it roughly, and as he did so a little yellow flower dropped in front of him. He picked it up in amazement, holding it to the light. It was an English primrose!

In an instant an occult influence seemed to steady his brain. He was no longer semi-intoxicated, so far as intelligence went. And as he glanced at his three companions, and more particularly at the mask-like visage of Horace, half Adonis, half Bacchanal, it occurred to him that the warning might have come from one still very dear to him, and that it might be one of those storm signals which can only be ignored at the gravest risk.

In the interim, the stranger, the big fellow across the road, had loated slowly and indifferently into the drinking-bar of the Burlbec Hotel, and had collared the negresque Mercury thereof by the metaphorical button-hole.

"Me bhoy, d'ye forgit yer ould chum? Bedad, thin, Oi think ye do. Oi'm althered, sure, since we last met. But for look, me bhoy, here's a matther of a half-dollar, sure, and it's mesilf will be asking of ye a throifle of a favor in retorrun."

"Yas, sare," responded the nigger, clutching the coin.

"There's a lot of gintlemin"—in a whisper—"rale foine gintlemin, in the saloon. They're sittin', sure, and takin' their aise, wid a bottle of the bist in their stomachs, sure. Now, me dear bhoy, it's mesilf is plaguy anxious to ascertain if won of thim telleys is called by the name of Mormyon?"

"Yas, sare. He am."

"Do ye mane it, now, ye black divil?"

"Yas, sare. Massa Marmyon. Letter come for him to-day. Yas, sare."

"And Misther Mormyon's stoppin' now in this hotel?"

"Yas, sare. No, sare. He go 'way with Judge Potterer, and the oder massas. Right away, sare, soon."

"Eh, what? Till me now, ye black— Oi mane, sure, only me tongue's a way of disremimberin' itself, sure, me dear bhoy. Till me now h'where'st they are going to. Chicago, now, perhaps? Or maybe 'tis Balthimore, or Hong Kong, for the matther of that?"

"Yes, sare. They go, sare, to Long Camp."

"Oi'm aytornally obloiged. A wink sure's as good as a nod! Long Camp's away among the moiners, and them Ooirish moiners is moy porticilar friends. It's mesilt, ye black divil, that's portial entirely to gould—pervoided always that Oi've not the throuble of airning it by hord labor, sure. Hord labor, bedad, is not shuited to the spicial talents of a gintleman, and Oi'll have ye t' understand, sorr, that if Oi'm a Raypublican, and an advocate of ayqual'ty in the stup'd ould counthree over the say, Oi'm a downroight gintlemin in the Unoited States. Good day to ye, Sambo, and ye'll know me again another toime by token of the half dollar Oi put between yer two fingers."

With that this big fellow with the broad Irish brogue departed, not, however, before he had indulged in another prolonged stare at the saloon window. Robert, however, had changed his position. He was sitting in silence, smoking and thinking, while Horace was apparently narrating some sort of racy anecdote that caused Dolopy to roar and Judge Potterer to relax into a smile.

A few minutes later the bell sounded for a second edition of the champagne, hypothetically imported from the vineyards of Epernay, and in response thereunto the colored Mercury entered, rather inflated with self-importance.

"Have you seen the gentleman?" he asked of Robert.

"Eh—what? I don't understand. What gentleman, please?"

"Well, sare, a gentleman came ten minutes ago, and inquire for Massa Marmyon. Yes, sare."

"Was his name Benito?"

The waiter shook his head. He knew "Billy" by heart.

"Or Frayney—Pat Frayney of Long Camp?"

Again the nigger's cranium wagged negatively.

"Then," said Robert, "I can't conceive who it is. You are certain he inquired after Mr. Marmyon?"

"Cartain, sare. Irish gentleman, sare."

Robert relapsed. This was too enigmatical, quite, nor was the mystery explained when Horace took up the ball, and pestered the nigger with questions. All that could be got out of the fellow was, that the inquirer was a stranger to him, and a very nice man.

"Wall," remarked Judge Potterer, as the ebony Mercury retired, "I guess the mysterious stranger has greased the palm of that nigger's paw pretty slick. When a man asks a question of a nigger, and that nigger calls him nice, 'tis a half dollar; you bet."

And the judge was right, as we know.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LONG CAMP AT LOGGERHEADS.

THE scene is the drinking-bar of the store at Long Camp. The time midnight. The bar has been all the evening crowded with miners, but nearly all have left. There remain, however, at either end, apart from each other, two small knots of men, each apparently indulging in a sort of confidential palaver, for their heads are turned toward a common center in either group, and each center seems to be endowed with no mean authority, to act less in the capacity of chairman, speaker, or delegate than of absolute autocrat.

One of the centers, needless perhaps to add, is Mr. Billy Benito, the other Mr. Patrick Frayney.

The murmur of tongues proceeded for some time, waxing louder and louder, especially among the loquacious and irritable men who were gathered round Pat Frayney. At last, however, these fellows seemed to have arrived at some sort of programme, for Pat severing himself from them called out aloud, as he walked half-way toward the opposite group, "Misther Benito, Oi'll ask the favor of a worrud wid you, sorr, av' ye plaze."

Billy Benito was talking on still in a sort of undertone to his comrades. But as the grating noise of the Irish brogue fell on his ears, he turned his head over his shoulder, and glancing at Frayney responded, "I will join you, sir, in half a minute." Then he continued his chatter.

Mr. Frayney looked round upon his compatriots, who stood in the distance scowling, but he waited a long minute in silence. Then he said, though in a lower tone, but with marked emphasis, "It's now or nivir, be jabers, Misther Benito!"

Billy Benito smiled rather insolently. Then he remarked, in a loud stage aside, "The chap's in a 'tarnal hurry," and slowly advanced toward him.

"Oi'm requisted, sorr, by me friends and compatriots to state, sorr, that they are not prepared, sorr, to indure any longer their wrongful exclusion, sorr, from the Popsy placer. If, sorr, y'are willin' to mate us on fair terrums, the matther may be settled, sure, agrayably to all parties—and we'd loike to know, sorr, w'whether the moiners of this location is thus disposed, sorr, to mate the Oirish gintlemin half-way?"

"Wall, sir," answered Benito, "you are proposing a conundrum for my solution that I can't answer right away. Our people, sir, claim the Popsy set as theirs by right of priority. We were located on these placers, sir, before your people emigrated from your own country to this location, and we are not prepared, sir, to admit to our diggings any strangers but such as are acceptable to our people. We should have admitted the Irish, if they had made themselves acceptable; but as you are aware, they did not elect to do that same."

"Oi am aware, sorr, of the circomstances that have occurred, and also, sorr, that the fault was not all on won soide, and Oi'm willin',

sorr, to engage on behalf of the gintlemin whom Oi have the honor to represint, that if you'll mate them fair and square, they'll mate you ayqual intoirely."

"Guess," remarked Benito, sullenly, "we've 'mated' with the Irish once too often. Guess we would prefer, sir, for your people to inhabit one continent and our people the other. With the Atlantic Ocean to separate us we can 'mate' comfortably."

"Oi did not say mate," rejoined Frayney, reddening angrily at the other's play of words. "Oi said mate, sure!"

"Then," said Benito, grinning, "I'm not disposed either to mate with you, or to mate you—whichever you like. You bet."

"Holy Moses, thin!" hissed Frayney, foaming at the mouth—"bhut it's yersilf may live to repint them worruds, Mr. Benito. Oi'm insthructed by my friends"—pointing to the angry faces of the knot of Irishmen—"to offer what ye may call an oltimatim. It's this sorr. Fair play for Oireland, or foul play for revinge. We worruk wid ye, sorr, as brothers, or, be this and be that, nobody shall worruk at all, at all, for we'll blow up the moine, as sure as yer name's Benito. We're sworn to't, iv'ry man jack of us, sorr."

"You are, are you? Then, Mr. Frayney, as the mouthpiece of the Yankees in this location, it is my duty to inform you, sir, that the very first act of violence performed on our ground by any one of your gang will be met with the punishment it deserves. Don't imagine we shall trouble to hunt about for the principals in any outrage. We shall not do so, sir. We shall treat every Irishman in this location as a principal, and settle with them accordingly. You have, sir, done me the honor of conveying a threat from the men you represent. Favor me, sir, in return by conveying to your friends there my words of warning. I wish you good-night, Mr. Frayney."

They say that the language of European diplomacy is, in accordance with the dictum attributed to Talleyrand, an admirable vehicle for concealing thought. The diplomatic diction of Long Camp was perhaps less carefully wrapped up, but it was, at all events on the part of the embassador of the Yankees, by no means lacking in the quality of cutting culture. He walked leisurely back to his comrades, who laughed low and sneeringly at his recital of the Irish delegate's menace, while Pat Frayney's compatriots, when they learned that their overtures were rejected, shook hands all round to the muttered curse of "Blood!"

At that moment, however, a big man stalked into the drinking booth, nodded carelessly to Benito, and with a loud laugh advanced toward Frayney.

"Mike Conolly!" was the cry from the Irishmen.

"The same, me dear bhoys. And h'wat's in the wind now? Sure the phiz of iv'ry divil in the place looks as black as a coal-pit. Arrah, bhoys, spake up, will ye? Is't the yelly faver?"

In a dozen words Frayney explained the situation.

Mike Conolly looked grave for an instant, then the merry twinkle returned to his tigerish eyes, and he strode down the booth right up to Benito.

"Billee, me ould friend," he cried, shaking him fiercely by the hand, "will ye have a dthrink now? And your mates here, bedad, they'll join us. It's toime for good little bhoys to be in bed, but

'twill nivir do, sure, for thim small craytures to retoire to the arrums of Morphy widout a noightcap."

At which sally there was a general laugh, and Mike's offer of drink, *malgré* his brogue, which sounded inimical, and his intimacy with Frayney, was accepted cheerfully all round by the Yankees.

"Now, Benito," he pleaded, "don't be too rough on them counthrymen of moine. They mane well, but, bedad, they've a habit now of expressin' their maning so as to deludther a Sassenach into the belafe that they mane t'other thing. But they don't."

"They have an idea," rejoined Benito, "of blowing up the mine. Cac'late that idea must not root."

"A-whish. It's nonsense ye're talkin'! They couldn't mane that way. It's onpossible altogithir; or if they did mane it, 'tis the drink's in their heads, sure, and they'll slape it off. Ye'll let me till them now, Benito dear, that ye'll be happy to listen to h'what they wish to say to-morrow mornin', sure?"

Benito laughed.

"Yes," he replied, "you may tell them as much as that—only—"

But before the words were out of his mouth Mike had traversed the intervening space between the two antagonistic knots of men, and had addressed himself earnestly to Frayney. There seemed to Benito's eye to be some sort of objection raised to Mike's amateur diplomacy, but the big fellow shouted at the men, and must have convinced them, for they one and all burst out laughing, and then Conolly returned to the grog he had left on the counter.

"There," exclaimed he, "I tould ye so! Thim fellys air as good as gould, but bedad for all that there's been the risk of murther and dynamoite, and a divil of a lot of mischief. Ye may trust me to put it all right and square, me dear bhoys, pervoided as ye'll be a bit raysonable."

However, *cadis cum fæce siccatis*, the liquor being floored, the company present thought it advisable to retire, and one by one with a brief nod issued forth from the atmosphere of tobacco and spirits into the silvern moonlight of the glorious South—a scene of enchantment utterly wasted on human beings both devoid of one spark of poetry and replete with the lowest intuitions of brutality.

There chanced, however, that night to be one individual in Long Camp endowed by nature with something of the poetic spirit—a man at all events who had cultivated beauty as the one chief good. It was unfortunate that this same beauty-worshiper entertained a positive repugnance for truth. The man who shuddered at consecutive fifths, or an inharmonious sequence of colors, or the faulty emphasis of a single syllable in an idyll or a lyric, was, by a strange paradox, incapable of distinguishing discords in action, or in sentiment, or in motive. In art he hated a lie; in ethics he loved it. In art he was a purist; in morality perversely lubricous. Crime indeed itself possessed a certain fascination for his nature, while religion he not merely laughed at but loathed.

This strange compound, at once dreamy and romantic below the surface, and flippant and cynical above-board, could not resist the fascination of a moonlit night. Hence, while Dolopy snored, and Judge Potterer, it may be presumed, dreamed of mining swindles, he wandered forth into the night with a cigar for his only companion.

His thoughts must have turned to Ida Frankalmoign, for her name rose involuntarily to his lips, when a biggish human figure came between his wandering eye and the dazzling moon.

"Halloo!"

"Big porrdon, sorr. No offince, sorr. If I'm not mistook, sorr, Oi've the honor of addthressin' one of the friends of Misther Mormyon, sorr."

"Yes. And who are you?"

"Bedad thin, and who are you? I ask sorr, becase, ye see, Misther Mormyon and mesilf, sorr, we indolged in a sloight difference, sorr, and it's mesilt that had the misfortin' to black his eyes for 'um."

"What," whispered Horace, "you're never a man called Conolly, are you?"

"That's me, sorr, and very much at your sarvice, sorr."

"But how did you come here?"

"That's tellin'. The loiner, sure, brought me from Liverpool to New York, afther Oi'd had jist a taste a' Maidstone Jail, and for that same ye may be sure Oi don't thank Misther Mormyon."

"You know all about Marmyon?"

"I do. His name was Hodge, sure, till the fates changed it to Mormyon. A-whish! I owes him one!"

"Ah! You owe him one. Then why don't you pay your debts? If I were in your shoes, I should give at least two for one, and I'm not your size."

"Maybe I will, maybe I won't. Maybe Oi'll fiddle the felly first and towel him afterward."

"Pshaw! If you want your revenge, kill two birds with one stone. There's more to be made, perhaps, by potting that fellow than by fiddling him—if you only knew as much, my friend Conolly!"

Mike farly started at this avowal. "But," said he in a low tone, "O'm the felly's inemy, you're his friend."

"Who told you that? I'm the friend of Errol Marmyon, the next heir to that big estate, and if by any unforseen chance this animal, who has spited you, should be removed—don't you know—I can calculate on—"

"A pile of gould, Oi'll be forsworn! And am I to onderstand, sorr, that ye'd share the pile wid a convanient friend as helped the young divil across the bridge betwain toime and t'other place?"

"You'd better take that for granted. Errol Marmyon is bound to me, and I'll be bound to you. But as you know, there can be neither a spoken nor a written bond. In a case of this sort, every man must safeguard himself. All I can pledge my word is, that if Errol should not keep faith with me, it will be the worse for him, and if I do not keep faith with you it would be the worse for me. I can not go beyond that, but I am on the square."

"Praycoisely. And Oi'll *take* yer worrud."

"Good. Then listen to me. This donkey of a fellow Marmyon—or Hodge, as he might more properly be termed, for he is Hodge by manners and in sentiments—this fellow, I say, has taken to hob-nobbing with a lot of Irish ruff— By the bye, you're Irish, I suppose, so I won't call them ruffians. Anyhow, there's a sort of dead-lock between the Irish and the Yankees of Long Camp. The

Irish, so I hear, intend to blow up the mine, and if so the Yankees mean to blow up the Irish. I should fancy that this fellow's meddling in what doesn't concern him ought to lead him into this quarrel, and that there need be no necessity why he should come out of it."

"H'which soide does he take—Oirish or Yankee?"

"He's identified himself with a person named Frayney, who is doomed, so Judge Potterer tells me, and the judge knows all this by-play by heart."

"Thin he's Oirish. Oi'm sorry for that, I am. Yet perhaps it's as well. There'll be mischief betwane the two porties, sorr, before that moon rayappears on the worruld agin."

"I should advise you, friend Conolly, to have a care for your skin. The Irish are outnumbered, and must come off second best."

"Thrue for you, sorr, and Oi'm obloiged for the advoice. It's mesilf is prepared to make the nicissary arrangements, and h'when the businiss is roipe for action, to thrack roight away, sorr. Frayney, sorr, is me dearest friend."

"Good. Then, Mr. Conolly, I wish you all success, and remember this, if things go right, and Mr. Errol Marmyon is indisputably the heir to the family estates, I am your debtor."

"And your name, sir?"

Horace paused. Should he reveal his identity?

There were no witnesses to this *tête-à-tête* conversation. That silver moon overhead was not a tale-bearer, but if this big bully found out later on that he had given a false name it might lead to painful complications. So he replied, indifferently, "My name is Horace St. Vincent. I am a cousin of Lady Marmyon. Again, good-night, and good fortune for us both."

"The same to you, sorr, and many of 'em," echoed Mike, with Hibernian irrelevance.

As soon as Horace had strolled away the Irish adventurer, who was ready for any deviltry, however diabolical, walked quickly to Frayney's cabin. It was verging on the small hours, but that able specimen of the dangerous classes had not retired to roost—in fact, he was closeted with two of his colleagues in close conference. The trio meant mischief, and were concerting measures in order to carry into execution the threatened project of blowing up the mine.

"Who's that? Spake, or Oi foire!"

"Hush. Moike Conolly, sure. Lit me in, dear!"

The bolt was drawn back, and Mike faced his congeners and fellow-conspirators—as one of them.

The tribal instinct of the Irish is proverbial. These descendants of the ancient Celts will hang together like leeches on a horse, and it signifies to them less than little whether the enterprise on which they happen to be bound is right or wrong, honorable or dishonorable. The quarrel being in essence Irish that is enough, and whether they are affected personally, or others only of their race, seems to be quite beside the mark. They cannot amalgamate with humanity. Not only in England and in the colonies, but to an even greater extent in the United States, these sons of Erin are alone, as separate a people as the Jews. And woe betide those who cross their path! With all who do not run against their angles they can somehow exist;

with those who offend them in the least particular they can find no *modus vivendi*. It might be supposed, from the language employed by their own agitators, that they would find a congenial home beneath the shadow of the star-spangled banner, under the purely democratic institutions of free America. This is not the case. As in Long Camp, so also throughout the length and breadth of the United States, the Irish, for some inscrutable reason, occupy an isolated position, and one more or less antagonistic to the rest of the community. Individually more often than not acceptable for their geniality and light-heartedness, they form collectively one of the chief and most difficult problems of modern America. In Long Camp we see them at their worst, for they represent, perhaps, the lowest type of the American Irish, men who are in essence rowdy, and at issue with others almost, if not quite, as rowdy as themselves.

Moreover here—for once let it be said in their history—they have on their side the semblance of right. The Yankees in the first instance admitted them to work on their placer. They might have kept them aloof, but they neglected this precaution, and having once admitted them, ought perhaps to have tolerated their presence. At all events it came to this, that when a quarrel between an individual Yankee and an individual Irishman led to a rupture between those two, the Irish by siding with their compatriot, who happened to be in the wrong, exasperated the Yankees, who forthwith proceeded to boycott the entire Irish contingent. The merits of the dispute, therefore, between the Yankees and Irish were pretty evenly balanced, but the latter certainly had reason to affirm that they suffered on account of their nationality, as indeed they did; perhaps, because their nationality had made itself party to a quarrel in a wrongful cause.

Pat Frayney, Mike Conolly, and the rest were soon in deep discussion as to the safest way of carrying out their intention of blowing up the mine and inflicting injury thereby all round. Mike took a very warm interest in the business, and afforded them the aid of a matured judgment plus the ready wit of a restless adventurer. The Yankees, he reminded them, had been forewarned, and would doubtless be forearmed. They would take some pains to intercept any attempt; and, further, it would be advisable to act with caution, for the simple reason that the attempt would be regarded almost as much a commencement of hostilities as success itself, and might be resented fiercely. In the States, it may be remarked, there is never much trouble in procuring a suspension of *Habeas Corpus*. A wire from Judge Potterer that "the citizens were in danger" would evoke the wire in reply from authority at the White House, "Protect your citizens;" in other words, "use your revolvers."

"Me bhoys," said Mike, "it moight be advoisible to blow up the moine at a moment, sure, when thim divils, the Yankees, is at worruk. That way ye'd make safe of not havin' a swarrum of 'um upon yez till ye could make convanient thracks, sure!"

"Ay, ay," echoed Pat Frayney. "Thrue for you, Moike, dear! We'll note that same. They'll nivir expect us to have the owdacity to blaze the whole caboose wid the hands about her. Be the holy Moses, Mick, but the mother as bore you must have been a foine woman intoirely."

"And further," remarked Mike, "I'll give yez a bit of advoice. Ye know that spalpeen Mormyon? Well, he is the heir-at-law to a divil of a big properthy in the ould counthry, with a barnetcy to boot. The Yankees knows all about that, and they won't hurt a hair of the baste's head. Intoice the felly to go wid you, and kape 'um wid you. Sure he'll be as good as an insurance policee agin bullets."

"Roight agin!" shouted Pat Frayney. "Sure that bhoy Mormyon's loike me own brother, and though he may be a Sassenach, his hort, sure, is wid us in this business! Leastways, in the roights of our demand, for divil a bit would he consint to blowin' up a moine. The felly's romantic and all that, and would have thried to bully Benito wid argyfying, if I'd let 'im. But we'll kape 'um wid uz, and then, be jabers, if the revolvers is dthrawn, and the bullets begins to floy, we'll put 'um to the front, sure."

"Agreed, agreed!" cried the others, and so by a single word of Mike Conolly a plot was formed of a character very perilous to the safety of an innocent and romantically benevolent man. Mike alone, however, knew the full nature of the risk, and he had inwardly registered a resolve to render it so enormous that the chances of Robert escaping were almost *nil*.

"At noon to-morrow, thin!" were Frayney's last words, as Mike passed forth into the night. "At noon, plaze the pigs, we'll blow the moine and the tarnation Yankees skoy hoy. It's altogither a great oidea. Eh, Moike?"

"Bedad, yes. As big as an oidea can be till it's written in the page of histhory. Here's luck and long life to ye, Frayney dear, and to all the bhoys, wid a prayer for ould Oireland."

And with that benediction the man of reckless red-ruin went away to sleep, as though life and death were the merest trifles.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"AS A SHEEP TO THE SLAUGHTER."

Mr. Horace St. Vincent belonged to that influential order of society which inverts the aphorism "Early to bed, and early to rise." His habit was to retire to roost unwillingly, indeed with an excess of procrastination, and to rise rather more unreadily and procrastinatingly. In this particular his habits were the precise opposite of those of Judge Potterer, who invariably welcomed the early morning sun, even when the claims of festivity had kept him awake to the verge of the small hours. Whether he went to bed with the sun or not, he always rose with it. Consequently, while Horace slept—we will not call it quite the sleep of the just—the judge was taking his walks abroad to some purpose, as we shall see.

First he knocked up Billy Benito, with whom he seemed to be on terms of perfect accord. Their confabulation lasted perhaps a short half hour; after which he returned to his own quarters, and awoke Robert, who, since he had resumed externally amicable relations with Horace St. Vincent, had quitted the shelter of Pat Frayney's hospitable roof, and returned to his quarters with the judge.

Robert needed no second call, but was out and about with due celerity, and responded readily to the judge's request for a short stroll before breakfast, by way of an appetizer.

"Mr. Marmyon," remarked Judge Potterer, with half-closed eyelids, as though the matter was one of utter indifference to him personally, "there is a storm brewing on the mine. It will burst to-day—you bet—over somebody's head."

"I know all about it, more than you do," replied Robert, rather vainglorioously. "These fine fellows are my mates in a certain sense. Well, sir, I'm sorry to hear it."

"That is so, Mr. Marmyon, and that too is the reason why I was anxious to collogue with you—some."

"Right you are, judge. I'm all attention. This concerns me."

"You bet, Mr. Marmyon. Then listen. If, sir, there were two regiments of artillery drawn up in array against each other, and pounding away kerslap, would you prefer, sir, as a man of common-sense, to occupy the central position between these two regiments?"

"I see what you mean," answered Robert.

"Then, Mr. Marmyon, what may be your line to-day?"

Robert looked rather staggered by this direct question.

"Because," continued the judge, with inimitable coolness, "as far as I can see ahead, there ain't an almighty big chance of you're being an eye-witness of this time to-morrow morning."

"Do I understand you that between two fires I am pretty certain to fall?"

"I leave that to your common-sense, Mr. Marmyon. But I may tell you, sir, what your common-sense has hitherto omitted to instruct you, that a bullet in your gullet would gratify some—at least one gentleman of our acquaintance—a gentleman, sir, who has been colloguing with the next heir to the estate of Marmyon Court, England, I reckon."

Robert started as though he had been shot. Never once had he guessed this, and the suggestion sent his head whirling with half a hundred ideas. The illiterate and illegible warning from Marmyon Court was evidently not penned in vain. And yet, was it possible that Sir Robert could be so unutterably base as to strive to compass his eldest son's destruction? On the spur of the moment he almost persuaded himself that such might be the case, yet in another instant indignantly rejected the suspicion as unworthy of himself.

"You seem surprised," remarked the judge, dryly.

"Yes," gasped Robert, "I am at once enlightened and astonished. Surely wealth is a curse!"

"Why, cert'nly, to the 'coon that hasn't got it. But come, Mr. Marmyon, I did not wake you up before your time in order to philosophize. I am your friend, sir, and shall be consarned to prove that statement in a practical manner. Halt—front, sir, and attend to me! St. Vincent hasn't a darned dime left. He spec'lated Sir Robert's dollars at baccarat, and lost every cent, and I tell you this, sir, he CAN'T bring you back safe to your country. One way or the other, by accident or on purpose, you must clear off, or he'll sink to almighty smash. I warned you a week ago to hitch off, and slip away. That warning I now repeat, sir, and to show I'm in

fair airnest, here's a pile which you can loan of me, on terms, sir," and he pulled out a roll of paper.

"Upon my honor, I'm grateful, judge. But, stop, let me review the situation. If I interfere between Frayney and Benito, I shall do no good, but shall lose my life in all likelihood."

"You will do no good, you bet, and you will lose your life—for sartin, Mr. Marmyon."

"And if I continue to travel with Horace St. Vincent I run quite as great a risk."

"You run the almightiest risk of sudden death; besides, there isn't a cent to travel with."

"And I am to believe that my own flesh and blood desires my sudden death?"

"That is so, sir .They mean it—some of 'em."

"Then, judge, done with you! I'll accept your terms whatever they are—provided that they don't involve either of us in dishonor, and answer to my notions of squareness."

The judge smiled in his own strange, sardonic fashion. His was not the smile of spontaneous pleasure, the sparkle on the sunlit ripple of life, but a sort of grim, dark expression of gratification at getting the best of a bargain."

"Wall, sir," he said, squinting at the young man as one who feels his way—"wall, sir, I guess my terms may sound stiff to your ears, because you're not accustomed to the business arrangements of a free country. But they are mine, sir, and not yours, and you may take them or leave them. I hold in my hand, sir, one thousand dollars of good American money. That sum may purchase your liberty and your life. You ought, Mr. Marmyon, to pay an almighty lump for either; and, sir, the half of your reversion for both would be dirt cheap. But I am not a Shylock. I would not take an unfair advantage of the necessities of a gentleman. I might, sir, demand your bond for a big lump sum, but I shall not ask that. I am a moderate man, sir, and content with a moderate profit in return for a moderate risk. I will, therefore, lend you these thousand dollars at, say, fifty to one. Now, sir!"

Robert opened his eyes at this too disinterested proposition.

"What!" he almost gasped; "am I to understand that if I borrow your thousand dollars I am to enter into an engagement to pay you fifty thousand dollars?"

Judge Potterer's face lengthened, if it be possible, and he sheltered himself behind a look of superlative stupidity, as though he were fairly puzzled.

"No, sir," he replied, adroitly shifting his ground. "You do not apprehend my meaning. Let me explain, sir. I advance you the sum of one thousand dollars. You go and tumble over Niagara, or fight a duel, or get cracked up in a railway smash. Wall, sir, in that event my dollars go pop. Or you cross back to the old country, and forget all about the transaction, and then I have to spend five times the amount to recover my money. You must consider my risk, sir, and the fact that I am likely to be kept out of the use of a sum I could turn over and double at least once a month. Hence, sir, I do not reckon fifty American dollars to one English sovereign stiff."

Robert was quick enough to perceive the judge's rapid change of front, but he felt indisposed to further parley. Horace, on their landing in America, had handed him two hundred dollars for his own personal use; and as he had not paid away anything except in drinks to the miners and to Pat Frayney for his board, railway journeys and hotels having been settled by Horace, he had over a hundred dollars in his pocket, and, rather unwisely perhaps, esteemed himself rich enough to be independent.

"No, thank you," he replied, curtly, "I do not require a loan of any kind. Understand me, however, I am none the less grateful for your straight tip, sir, and if ever I come into my inheritance I shall made a point of recompensing you—perhaps beyond your expectations."

"Wall, sir," muttered Judge Potterer, expectorating angrily, "you must take your own course. I should much prefer, sir, to keep my dollars in my pocket—some; but I was willing to assist you as a matter of business. You have, sir, in the exercise of your discretion, declined my offer, and you will understand that it is withdrawn and will not be renewed."

"I don't wish it to be," retorted Robert, haughtily.

"You bet. That is not, however, the last word between us. We are strangers, Mr. Marmyon, you and I; and I, as a stranger, have communicated in confidence to you some valuable information. You will have to recoup me for that, sir."

"Recoup you? It cost you nothing to speak out."

The judge stared steadily at the ground, and remained meditative—uglily so.

"What do you want then?" demanded Robert, curtly.

"Perhaps, sir, being an American citizen, and unaccustomed to the dialect of London, England, I have not expressed myself clearly. You are not aware of it, but your position here among these miners is one of peril to yourself. You have mated with either side. Let one or the other suspect you, sir, of playing Judas, and you'll be settled, sir, slick off the reel. Our people don't stop to argyfy."

"Yes. Possibly—albeit I think you're wrong: but anyhow, what on earth has my relation with these miners to do with Judge Potterer?"

The judge again expectorated freely, closed one eye, and responded, "You bet."

Now of all inane formulæ this one is perhaps the most trying to the patience of your exasperated Briton; and Robert just now was waxing irritable. He muttered, angrily, "Bosh!" and was about to turn on his heel when the judge added, with cool indifference, "I'm going to interview Benito, I guess, before breakfast. That is if I am to understand it's off."

"What's off?"

"Our ne-gotiation, Mr. Marmyon, I'm referring to."

"It isn't on yet, because you haven't stated your wishes."

"Wall, if that's it, I'll be almighty straight. Your bond, sir, for ten thousand dollars is the consideration I shall require in return for my information—and dirt cheap, too, if you value your tarnation life a red cent, or else—"

"Well, sir, what is the alternative?"

"It's off!"

Robert reddened with anger. There stood before him, with the *sang froid* of a footpad, this so-called judge of the great American Republic, in scarcely veiled language demanding his money or his life. His answer was "Good-morning," as he turned upon his heel contemptuously.

He did not, however, at once return to the judge's quarters, but walked some distance sharply to cool his head and consider.

Was the judge's information of the nature of a plant? It wore that appearance, and he would have hastily jumped at that conclusion but for the weird corroborative evidence of that anonymous warning from Marmyon, and the testimony in his mind to its truth afforded by that little humble floweret.

He was quite undecided how to act, when by accident he met Pat Frayney.

"The t'hop of the mornin' to Misther Mormyon, sure! Arrah, me bhoy, this is a big day for Long Camp, and it's mesilf entertains a hope that the son of Sorr Robert Mormyon will not daysort his brothers in labor, the brave Oirish lads!"

Robert's face was rather anxious, and he seemed in no mood to listen to blather, for he responded curtly, "I am your friend, Pat, and the friend of the boys to the bitter end, so long as you keep on the side of right in this dispute. But if you talk about outrages, blowing up the mine, and that sort of thing, don't ask me to back you. I could not—on principle."

"Bedad, thin, dear, listen to me. 'Tis won thing to purtend, sure, that the moine's to be sint to almoighty smithereens, and another, sure, intoirely to carry out that same big threat. We're thrying it on, that we are, Misther Mormyon, but divil a bit do we mane it. Och, thin, dear, 'tis onpossible, quoite!"

"Oh, if that's all," said unsuspecting Robert, "I'm with you. I told Benito that your cause was, in my judgment, the right one, and so long as it remains so I'm bound to stand by you."

"Will, thin, dear, Oi'll tell ye a sacrit. There's going, this very day as is, to be an attimpt made—a foul and dastardly attimpt, sorr—to dhtroive us off the location altogither. Now, we'd not be asking you to intherfere on our behaf, sorr, for maybe we can take care of oursilves; but, sorr, if Benito persaves that ye're wid us, he'll have to be modtherate in his tone. So, me dear, Oi'll be glad if ye'll accept a mouthful of Chicago bacon, and a dthrop of the craythur, and thin we'll march arrum-in-arrum to the moine, sure, and face the divils."

"Good!" cried Robert, enthusiastically. "I'm your man, Pat, for to-day only. To-morrow I may be miles away from Long Camp."

"Bedad, thin," replied Pat, with a grin of genuine amusement, "ye don't say so, now! It's sorry I am, Misther Mormyon, to think of your sudden dayparture. We'll be afther losin' the best friend we have."

The pair walked away, as Mr. Frayney put it, "arrum-in-arrum," and *en route* for the Irishman's cabin, met, as luck would have it,

Judge Potterer, who was returning from a second and a serious conference with Benito.

"Air you going to honor us with your company at breakfast, Mr. Marmyon?" inquired the judge, in a sort of half satirical tone, that harmonized with his expression of countenance.

"Thank you, no. I'm bound for the mine with Frayney."

Judge Potterer smiled, and passed on quickly, muttering to himself and almost laughing.

Arrived at his quarters, the chief and best appointed dwelling in the village, the judge summoned Horace and Dolopy to a conference. The former gentleman was much indisposed to arise after his prolonged midnight ramble, but obeyed the judge's summons. The latter, having slept long and soundly, was soon *en evidence* and in splendid cue.

"Wall," observed the judge *sotto voce* over his hominy—his digestion was normally that of an ostrich—"you may wire this evening to Mr. Errol Marmyon that he's the boss in reversion of that show over there. There are some people in this location, sir, who are what you may call foolhardy, hardy fools, I cal'clate, but of all the fools between Mexico and Manhattan, Robert Marmyon's the almighty biggest. You bet."

"What's he done now?" asked Dolopy, indifferently.

"He has traveled up the mine right away with Pat Frayney," observed the judge, rubbing the side of his nose.

"You don't mean it!" cried Horace, laying down his knife and fork, and positively turning pale. "*Quem Deus vult perdere, prius dementat!*"

"Why, cert'nly!" echoed the judge, who did not understand a word of Latin, but was unwilling to proclaim his ignorance.

"Gone to commit self-pottification," responded Dolopy, with his mouth full and a merry sparkle in his eye.

"That," continued Judge Potterer, smiling rather sardonically at Horace, who evidently was in a state of extreme agitation, and could neither eat nor indeed convey his fork to his mouth, owing to the unsteadiness of his hand—"that is the first item in the programme. Now for the second, gentlemen. I have made it my business to ascertain precisely what is going to happen. I might stop it all, if I chose, but I don't for two reasons. First, to oblige you gentlemen, I do not object that Marmyon should be put out of the way so easily and expeditiously. Secondly, it is to my interest to get rid of those tarnation Irish. I shall, therefore, let matters slide; but I have wired to the White House for liberty to protect the citizens, and this permit allows Benito the fullest liberty of action. He will *revolve*, sir, the entire Irish colony, and I shall then have the gratification of wiring to the White House, 'Order restored!' while my property will be safe."

"Ye-es!" laughed miserably Horace St. Vincent, whose teeth were chattering, his nerve being of a very inferior order, as indeed is the case with most gentlemen of a poetic temperament who indulge in pegs. "It is all beautifully arranged—beautifully, yet somehow now that it comes to the point, I d-don't quite feel comfortable. Marmyon's a brute and that sort of thing, but—well, I suppose I'm a sentimental humbug!"

"You bet," snuffled nasally the judge. "But, sirs, I must protest that we've nothing to do with the job. It's no business of ours if Mr. Robert Marmyon runs his nose into danger. I warned him—some. I should not have done so had I supposed he would take a hint. Certainly not. I did not wish, however, to interrupt the harmony of our breakfast-table by alluding to this gentleman, except as the acceptor of a certain bill, which you, Captain Dolopy, will take to 'Frisco to be discounted. I shall esteem it a favor, captain, if you will hold yourself in readiness to proceed kerslap to 'Frisco as soon as the signal sounds."

"The signal," cried Dolopy. "What signal, if you please?"

"Benito tells me that the Irish have procured dynamite in large quantities to explode the mine. This contingency must be prevented, for it would spell ruin to me, and so the moment one of these Hibernians, sir, is detected locating the dynamite for a felonious purpose, Benito will pass the word 'Protect the citizens.'"

"And what then?" demanded Horace, still nervously.

"You will hear the simultaneous report of fifty revolvers, and Captain Dolopy can then make tracks by the first train for 'Frisco. It is important the dollars should change hands before the decease of the acceptor is announced by telegram."

"Right," replied Dolopy. "Then let us light our cigars, and wait patiently for the signal. I suppose, by the bye, they won't let Marmyon off?"

"You bet!"

"I—I—I think," stammered Horace, "that as I don't feel quite well, I'll go and lie down. I've got rather a sick-headache, and a nap would set me right."

"A nap?" laughed the judge. "Why, certainly, you've just woke out of one. Can you manage another nap kerslap?"

"I never travel without my patent morpheus," was the quiet rejoinder.

And so while Horace St. Vincent departed to lull his conscience literally to sleep, Captain Dolopy and Judge Potterer callously sat over their cigars to wait the death signal.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE SIGNAL SOUNDS.

WHILE Judge Potterer and Captain Dolopy were thus lazily indulging in the fragrant tobacco of the Southern States, with the fresh morning air breathing its sweets upon their hard, selfish visages, the man whose life was—in plain English—wanted, trudged toward the placer called "Popsy," where all Long Camp was at work.

Probably, if Robert had had the faintest inkling of the net-work of cruel villainy wherewith he was environed he would have taken to his heels and bolted for dear life. But, as we know, he believed Benito to be his friend, and Frayney to be his friend, and their companions, whether Yankee or Irish, to be his friends. In the old country, if a working-man stands drinks continually, and those equivocal luxuries are accepted, he naturally esteems the acceptors

as his friends. In the atmosphere of Long Camp they managed things differently. As Dean Mansel sings:

"In a free, enlightened nation,
Who shall blame repudiation?"

As the pair approached the placer, which was situate within gunshot of the village, though the path leading to it happened to be labyrinthine and circuitous, at an angle of the road they literally cannoned against Mike Conolly.

Robert started back as at an apparition.

"Be jabers, thin," cried Mike, advancing as a bull-dog upon an Italian grayhound, "Oi did not expect to have the shupreme honor of mating Misther Marmyon. A-whish, Frayney, 'tis mesilf stands indibted to this gintleman for a taste of the insoide of Maidstone jail, and a few turruns on the thread-mill of that same. Me dear sorr"—advancing close to Robert—"h'when last we met I left ye loyin' on the grane grass in front of yer ancistral demesne. Oi'll be happy to afford ye the satiswhaction of a gintleman right away h'wheniver yer pluck's ayquil tc the occasion, and the sooner the betther."

"Did I send you to Maidstone jail?" said Robert, in response to the accusation.

"Bedad, no! But that ould baste, Sorr Robert Mormyon did, and he'll be paid for that same, as moy name's Moike Conolly."

Robert returned the Irishman's steady gaze. Then he replied, quietly, "I'm not your match, and besides there's nothing to fight about that I know of. Last time 'twas my girl. Now she's mine no longer. I don't want to interfere with you, but, as you know by experience, if I'm attacked I can take care of myself."

"A-whist then," interposed Pat Frayney, "sure nobody's goin' to foight at all! Mike, me dear bhoy, Oi'll have ye to know that Misther Mormyon's won of uz. He's moy liftinint sure this blessed day, and—"

"Why to-day?" asked Robert, rather sharply.

"To-day sure, and to-morrer sure, and for the nixt haf century. Arrah, let's be movin' on, Moike, or the bhoys will be callin' us traithors to the cause. Misther Mormyon, we look to you, sorr, for what ye may call moral support. Benito won't dare, sorr, to ordther us off, if a gintleman of your name and reputation supports us. Hooroo for ould Oireland! Moike, take Misther Mormyon's arrum, and as we're all on the job let's be thrue friends, and bad scran to the Yankees!"

And so before Robert knew quite the effect of the maneuver, Frayney had linked one arm in his and Conolly the other. Thus shoulder to shoulder they marched on the ground positively courting observation.

This aggressive movement, however, caused Robert to recall both the judge's warning and the presentiment which had been evoked by that little primrose. Perhaps it was the latter quite as much as the former which induced him to mutter, hesitatingly, "You give me your word, Frayney, that there's no mischief brewing to-day, no design upon the mine, no—"

"Faugh!" rejoined Frayney, impatiently. "See for yoursilf,

sorr. If there's mischief, then sure the bhoys 'ud be in it. Now, sorr, use them bright oyes of your own. Look round about you and see for yoursilf. Is there a son of Erin at work on this place? Divil a one! We're ordthered off this, and the bhoys daren't show. Ain't that a thrue bill, Moike Conolly?"

"Thrue as howly wather," rejoined Mike.

"Then," said Robert, innocently, "if the Irish are not here, what is the good of my coming? Benito can't order men off the mine who are not on it."

"Arrah, thin, it's raysonible y'are, Misther Mormyon," replied Pat. "But Oi'll till ye, me dear, Oi'd have thought that the bhoys 'ud be here, jist to see if Benito, afther my ultimatum, 'ud turrun 'em off. But they're afeared, they are, poor fellys. Sure the Yankees carries revolvers, and is ready to handle thim things widout regord to the porsonal convanience of Oirish gintlemin. Moike, darlint"—turning suddenly to Conolly—"h'what will we do? Could ye porsuade the bhoys now to stand up loike men, and face the inimy on his own ground? Bedad, a worrud from you, as a sthranger and a felly-counthryman, 'ud go a long way, so it would."

"Yer flattherin' of me, Pat," rejoined Mike. "The bhoys air me compathriots and that away, but it's you that is their layder and their chafe. Oi'll be bound now they're sulkin' at the store, and mortial afraid of Benito. Spake to 'im yersilf, me dear Frayney. 'Tis yersilf is blest wid the gift of the gab, sure!"

"Me tongue, Moike darlint, is not a patch upon yer own. Arrah, man, run down to the store yersilf, and fetch the fellys quick. Oi'm ashamed of them, Oi am!"

"I'll go, if you like," volunteered Robert.

"Bedad no, Misther Mormyon. If 'twas you began rayquesting them fellys to square up to Billy Benito, they'd gouge your oye for a traithor. It's thrue Oi'm tellin' ye, sorr. The Oirish, sorr, are a warrum-hearted and gen'rous race, leastways if ye get the roight side of them. If not, me dear sorr, they're the awkwardest, revengefullest lot on the face of the airth. No, sorr, you stop hereabouts, av' ye'll oblige, and smoke your cigar loike a bar'net and a man of aise, till I and Moike here goes and brings them lagging fellys up to the scratch."

Robert was rather bamboozled by all this maneuvering, but it happened that his mind was then preoccupied in the vain endeavor to reconcile various conflicting phenomena, and he was glad to be rid of the wearisome clack of these Milesians, the *gene* whereof was intensified by their brogue. So he contentedly sat down on a ledge of quartz, close to the adit of the mine, and began to smoke, while Conolly and Frayney disappeared swiftly in the direction of Long Camp.

He had not got through a cigar when he perceived Billy Benito in close conference with three or four Yankees, and presently, as they approached him in a body, he perceived an ominous look on their very marked features.

"Mr. Marmyon," said Billy, with quiet emphasis, "you and I have enjoyed drinks in one another's company; we have mated, sir, agreeably. But, sir, the line you have taken in colloguing with the Irish scum that are plotting against the American citizens in this

location has rendered you an object of suspicion. In self-defense we are obliged to meet plot with counterplot, and we are assured, Mr. Marmyon, that you have knowledge of those plots against the lives and the property of the citizens. It is, therefore, my painful duty to inform you, sir, that if any further attempt is made by your friends, we shall be compelled to treat you as an enemy of the American Republic. Do you understand me?"

"I don't," replied Robert—"not one bit. I am a friend of Pat Frayney, that I own, readily, and I have said openly that, in respect of this quarrel between the Yankees and Irish on this placer, the Irish are in the right and the Yankees in the wrong. That is my opinion; but beyond holding an opinion, and expressing it, I have taken no side in this business. I wished, indeed, to arbitrate, but—"

"That could not be heard of," interrupted Benito, sternly.

"Quite so," continued Robert, "and there the matter ended, so far as I was concerned, being an Englishman and an alien, except that—"

"What?" demanded Benito, angrily.

"Except that I have come here to-day to support a demand on the forbearance of the Yankees, which I was told would be put forward by all the Irishmen in the location."

Benito started at this, and turned to his friends as for an explanation. But they only exchanged glances.

"They're none of 'em here," he said. "And it might be well if you were somewhere else, too."

"Why?"

"Because some figures were observed as the moon was going down last night about the mine."

"Indeed! You surprise me."

"No, Mr. Marmyon, it's our turn to be surprised that you should be mixed up in the business. I don't appreciate, sir, your presence here, muchly. You air capable, sir, of being made a tool of by Pat Frayney and his gang. Suppose you was to travel now from this spot right away?"

"You misunderstand me—you wrong me," pleaded Robert, half in vexation, half in anger.

"That's as may be. What do you think, my boys?" turning to the others, who were getting obviously impatient.

"Move him!" was the unanimous cry, as of men who fancied they were being betrayed and were anxious to pitch upon the traitor in advance, without any special reference to justice, or indeed to aught else except suspicion, if not terror. They really believed the mine to be in danger, and the absence of the Irish confirmed their apprehension.

Clearly there was no possibility of resisting this imperious mandate. Robert perceived at once that the men were in downright earnest, but he was not to be turned ignominiously off the ground without a word of protest.

"Mates," he cried, "I'll go, not because I must, but because I wish to prove as far as I can that my motive in thrusting myself between two sets of laboring men, who ought to work in harmony together, is honest and pure. I leave Long Camp to-day—probably never to return. I leave this part of the States, possibly to cross

over to England, possibly to go farther afield. We have met as equals and comrades, and it grieves me to part on bad terms. If I were to say I'm for you as much as for the Irish, and for the Irish as much as for you, I should not be believed. But enough. I will obey you, Benito."

"You may be correct in your calc'lation, or the reverse," answered the other, in a somewhat more subdued tone. "Anyhow we don't trust men who can bring themselves to chum and collogue with Pat Frayney. We have been menaced, sir, and when an Irishman threatens, you keep an eye on your skin. We have been told that the mine is to be blown over our heads. It is so, sir, that we have adopted precautions to prevent that catastrophe—some. But we cannot take out an infallible insurance policy against dynamite, and for that reason it is our intention to minimize our risks. If you will accept advice, Mr. Marmyon, from a Yankee, you will make tracks right away from this location. By your own act you have become an object of suspicion to the citizens, and in the event of Irish treachery, sir—which you may regard as sartain—your life will be forfeited. There is no trial by jury, Mr. Marmyon, in a free country, no blatherumskite of condemning a man to death and then letting him off. We do not try in this location, sir, neither do we condemn, sir. Our line is execution on the spot, and burial immediately after. The business, sir, is slick, some—almighty slick, sir."

Robert, as he spoke, glanced at the man's hand. It was in his breast pocket and rested on a six-chambered revolver. That gesture satisfied him quite. He moved slowly away from the adit, but not in the direction of Long Camp. It seemed to his mind rank cowardice to run away before the return of Frayney and Mike, with or without their compatriots. For all that his wish was to be clear of this imbroglio.

In the interim Judge Potterer and Dolopy continued their cigars and pegs quite comfortably, albeit the former occasionally expectorated more than usual; a sure sign that his mind was irritable and on tenter-hooks.

"They air a tarnation long time over their business," remarked the judge at length. "I could, sir, have hanged a whole regiment and dug their graves while these Yankees are messing about a handful of Irish. But"—taking out his watch—"as it's getting nigh noon, captain, you may as well, perhaps, be preparing to travel. Have you got that bill ready?"

"Ready—ay, ready!" laughed Dolopy. "Here, my dear judge, is the reputed signature of Robert Marmyon, Marmyon Court, Kent County, England, who has, according to this veracious statement, received good value for fifty thousand dollars. Pity we could not make it four times that sum, judge."

"Why, certainly. But, captain, half a loaf's better than no bread, you bet. You would not get a 'Frisco discounter to part on a larger piece of paper, especially as you have not the man to show. No, sir, this is the best and biggest that can be effected in the city of San Francisco, and even that much could not be done if it were not for those blessings of civilization, the children of Israel, who are acquainted with the name of every 'coon with coin on the surface of

this planet, sir. Hist! what was that? Quick, captain. That sounds like business. Why, what—did you hear?"

Hear! Yes, indeed, Dolopy did, and half the Southern States apparently, for such a roar went up to high heaven as seemed to proclaim the dissolution of the planet, while the crashing glare in the windows told its own tale; indeed, the very tumblers they had been drinking out of fell to pieces spontaneously, while the din caused the drums of their ears to whiz, and almost stunned them.

"In the name of horror," cried Dolopy, after he had shaken himself to recover his breath, "what has happened? That's not the noise of revolvers."

"It is not, sir," groaned the judge, his face deadly pale—"it is not, sir. That, sir, is the sound of mater'l called dynamite. Those darned Irish have blown up the mine, and, by Jerusalem, Captain Dolopy, I'll have the blood of every man of them. You may save yourself the trouble of a journey to San Francisco, sir, for the wire will tell what's happened before you can get there, and the Jews won't look at that paper on my recommendation after this, and would not certainly do it without that. Now, sir, if you're disposed to see some sport come with me. An Irish battue, sir, is splendid. There's fifty of them to be revolvered, and Benito will do it. Come."

The judge's face as he spoke changed from ashen to crimson. The man was in truth reduced to the verge of ruin by this wanton act of Frayney, but the thought of revenge brought back the blood to his veins and aroused all the demon in his nature.

"What in the world is the significance of that shindy?" gasped Horace, meeting the pair at the door, and presenting the appearance of a man who has been suddenly awakened from a death-like sleep.

"They have blown up the mine," replied Dolopy, "and we're off to enjoy the spectacle of the Irish being exterminated. Will you come?"

"Not quite," replied Horace. "That sort of amusement is not in my line. I never could have appreciated the luxury of the amphitheater. No, I'll sit down and write across to England. That will prepare their minds for any possible contingency."

"*Au revoir*, then," cried the captain, "and order a good dinner, will you, Horace? We shall be hungry after this business."

"Hungry?" echoed Horace, after the door closed. "What pachydermatous blackguards some men are! I can't eat—I sha'n't eat for weeks to come. But I can write by way of relief to my Macbeth-like mind. Ugh! what a blessed world this would be without those two colossal evils, conscience and crime. It will pay me if that cad, Robert Marmyon, is potted, and yet I would hug the alternative of a crust of bread and liberty if only he could escape. Basta! What the parsons call guilt is clearly a mistake, at all events to a man of æsthetic sensibilities."

And so, as we already know, he took pen and paper, and wrote home that the mine was blown up; in a vein, too, of forced jocularity.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE AUTO-DA-FÉ.

JUDGE POTTERER and Dolopy walked hastily to the center of Long Camp village, armed, prudentially, with six-chambered revolvers. The Yankee miners were rushing in dozens headlong from the placer, their features distorted with fright and fury, and the cry arose that five of their number were killed, that the mine was a wreck, and that the Irishmen were nowhere to be found in the location.

"Where's Marmyon?" yelled the judge, at the top of his voice.

Nobody would answer. A few queries soon elicited the fact from the women of the village that the Irish had moved off in a body three hours before noon in the direction of Yatkuma, the next location southward, and that Frayney, with another, supposed to be Conolly, had ridden after them at headlong speed not quite half an hour before the explosion occurred.

"Then," cried the judge, "the order of the day is, protect the citizens. Follow the Irishmen, and lynch the entire gang!"

Benito, his eyes flashing fire, echoed this terrible mandate with a voice of thunder, and was greeted with a mighty cheer and the unanimous cry of "Ay, ay, boss." Revolvers and knives were fingered in anticipation, and the whole village of Long Camp turned out to slaughter their assailants.

Those who on this side of the ocean contend that the Irish, on account of their excellence of disposition and conspicuous virtues, should be condoned any such temporary ebullitions of temper as may result in assassination, incendiarism or any other form of outrage, including the reckless abuse of the potentiality placed at the disposal of every scoundrel in Europe by the invention of nitro-glycerine, would not meet with many sympathizers in the United States. Our American cousins, for their own reasons, utilize readily enough Hibernian malice when it happens to be directed against England and the English; but when that same ugly quality affects their own lives and limbs they never pause to parley. If Lord Frederick Cavendish had been a servant of the American Republic, and if Phœnix Park had been situated in the State of California, within ten minutes after the discovery of that foul crime the gutters of Dublin would have been running blood. Our method is calmer, more judicial, and, above all in essence Christian, but it utterly fails to prevent crime. The Irish set down our unwillingness to exact barbaric Nemesis to sheer cowardice, and they entertain a rooted conviction that John Bull can be terrorized into any and every humiliation. It would be well for them as a nation if there arose one honest Irishman to tell his compatriots how irrationally they misinterpret English character and English motives, and to contrast the scrupulous regard for justice evinced by our rulers—with the full approbation of our people—with the high-handed lynch-law of the United States. Such a Mentor might go further, and proclaim aloft the truth that there is no reform, no change, however revolutionary, in Ireland,

whereunto England would refuse her sanction, save only final and absolute severance. *Post equitem sedet atra cura*—at the back of Britannia, on her pillion, sits the figure of the direst Erinnys, who cannot be shaken off and is cruelly implacable. We would fain change that Fury into a friend if we could, but it takes two to ratify a bond of friendship, and the more we give the more merciless and vindictive does this satellite become. Possibly the introduction of the code of Judge Lynch would afford us a temporary respite; but from that we shrink with intense aversion. Whatever we are, we are at least nominally Christian, and our view of the Christian code does not permit the sort of Nemesis which finds favor among the Benitos and Potterers of anarchic America.

This is a digression, but the purpose of this narrative would fail if its moral were in any item obscured. The Irish ought to be forced by the public opinion of the civilized world to own the justice, and the tender regard for individual life and liberty, of the people whom they hate, revile, slander, and crave to injure. In England, or in Ireland itself, the Executive, in a case like that of the Popsy Mine, which was, as we have seen, exploded with the maximum of malignity, would have spared no effort to trace and identify the guilty parties, and on conviction the hangman's rope would have vindicated society. But we should never have inflicted the death penalty except on irrefragable evidence; we should have executed the principals only, and meted out a less punishment to their accomplices; while mere sympathy with a dastardly and diabolical act would not involve the open or secret sympathizer in criminal liability.

In the rough and turbulent region of Long Camp vengeance followed with swift and sudden steps after crime. Frayney and his compatriots knew that well enough, and they had laid their plans accordingly. The bulk of the Irish colony had moved off one by one between daybreak and noon. Frayney himself, with Mike Conolly, who had been the actual dynamitard, having, with his own hand, set the clocks overnight, so as to time the explosion to a few minutes before noon, were, as we know, the last to leave, having procured horses to assist their flight. The implicated Irishmen, doubtless, expected that their ringleader, with his powerful accomplice, would follow them to Yatkuma. If so they were in error. Both these cunning rowdies had too large a regard for their own skin. They started *en route* for that place, and were believed to have reached their companions' trail, but as soon as they were beyond the range of field-glasses the pair adroitly doubled, and made for San Francisco, with the design of pushing forward northward.

Billy Benito was something more than a mere ganger or leader of laboring men. In his way the clever fellow possessed not a few of the qualities which go to make a general. Thus, as soon as the march on Yatkuma was decided on, he impressed all the horses in the village of Long Camp, mounted his best riders, and placing them under the command of Captain Dolopy—late, as the reader may remember, of the Queen's service—ordered them to occupy the reverse side of Yatkuma, so that the enemy should not be able to steal away, and have to be followed yet further afield. Then with the main body, and the quasi-moral support of Judge Potterer, who flourished the license from the White House to employ any and

every expedient in order—as it was paradoxically worded—to "protect the citizens," he moved forward to the attack, eager for revenge, and proud in the consciousness of his force being in the proportion of at least ten to one to that of the Irish contingent.

"The awkward part of the business is," whispered Dolopy to Judge Potterer, as he rode away, "that I'm bound in honor to save Marmyon if the opportunity occurs."

"Wall, sir," rejoined the conscientious functionary, "then don't let the opportunity occur. You can invent a blind eye, sir, as your Lord Nelson might have at Copenhagen, if he hadn't had one ready-made. Marmyon, Captain Dolopy, has out of simple cussedness constituted himself a party to the almightiest crime that has disgraced the annals of the State of California, and if you don't revolver him for that same, maybe there are those who will. You bet, Dolopy."

And so the cavalry squadron trotted forward; in loose array the company of miners followed, while behind them—a practical satire on the genius of misrule—straggled the wives and elder children of those five miners who lay dead on the placer, the miserable victims of Irish devilry.

At first the march was silent, broken only by the sobs and moans of the women, for men about to encounter danger, and to execute condign vengeance in the sacred name of justice, have not the heart to chatter. The distance to be traversed was a long seven miles, and that under the afternoon sun of a Californian spring alone involved no small fatigue. Indeed, as they gradually approached within sight of the location which retained its ancient Indian nomenclature, Judge Potterer called a halt, and Billy Benito, from a basket he carried, containing bottles, served out all round a dram of that maddening fluid which imparts anticyran courage—the Mexican demon, pulque.

That, however, was not all. The judge and Benito had resolved to prime their agents, but to arouse also all the savagery in their not very gentle natures. "Hell for hell" was their diabolical motto.

"Citizens," snarled, rather than cried, in his most nasal tone, that representative of law and order, Judge Potterer—"citizens, in the name of the star-spangled banner, I bid you do your duty. You have under your eyes the wives and offspring of your murdered comrades. They have marched with you these long miles, citizens, to be the eye-witnesses of the punishment of the cold-blooded criminals who have made them widows and orphans. You have the full authority of the President of the Republic to obliterate these outlaws, and I call upon you to spare nary one of the lot. The citizen that spares an Irishman will have to settle conclusions with the Republic, in virtue of whose mandate I now appoint Citizen Benito as generalissimo, to carry through this business. You will obey his orders, citizens, and I reckon will do your duty. Now! Fall in and steady!"

In a trice Benito had deployed his men, so as to environ as in a belt three-fourths of the small station of Yatkuma, the remainder being already covered by Dolopy, and his mounted miners, who were visible already in the distance waiting for the fray. As they

advanced cautiously in their horse-shoe form, the wings extending right and left, a Yatkuman came forward, and was duly challenged.

"Citizen," said the judge, "you see this warrant. I require you to aid in protecting the citizens."

"Wall, certainly, you bet, judge, this 'coon's Yankee."

"Where are those cussed Irishers located?" inquired Benito, in the sort of tone that commanded a direct answer.

"Gin'ral," replied the man, slowly, "guess they may be found almighty drunk and quarrelsome inside the store. Calculate some they don't expect visitors."

"Right. Then, quick, go and tell the storekeeper to turn them out kerslap, or it will be bad for him."

The man grinned knowingly. "The storekeeper, you bet," he said, "goes by the name of O'Flaherty. That sounds almighty Irish. Guess he will not hurry to eject his friends and countrymen."

Judge Potterer smiled and nodded to Benito, who passed the order to move forward stealthily.

Little by little they closed in upon the devoted store, wherein, as they had been correctly informed, these rowdy accomplices in a cruel crime were roistering, quite oblivious of impending peril. They had not calculated upon being followed up quite so promptly, and besides that were confidently awaiting the advent of Frayney and Conolly. In fact, not one man of them at the moment knew for certain that the plot had succeeded. Clocks constructed to explode dynamite not seldom fail at the crisis, and it was an even chance that they had run away from Long Camp without any definite cause.

At last the two horns of this segment of a circle met; the mounted men vaulted from their horses, and the women pressed forward to witness and gloat over the butchery.

Some one, however, must have given the alarm, for ere ever they reached the entrance of the store it was bolted firmly in their face, while in a moment the whiz of half a dozen bullets warned them that the enemy meant to show fight, and in another moment one of their men dropped wounded.

"Smoke 'em out," yelled Benito, fiercely.

"Ay, ay," chimed in the judge—"there's enough petroleum about that store, you bet, to roast a regiment!"

Swift as lightning the miners collected wood and other combustibles, while by a well-directed fusilade at the windows of the store they contrived to silence the Irish fire. A keg of petroleum from a neighboring cabin was then flung on the pile and a match applied. In less time than the words take to write the walls were ablaze, and as the flames rose like dancing pyramids in the glaring sunlight a wild shriek poured in one hideous volume from the throats of the drunken ruffians within, now imprisoned in a winding-sheet of living fire.

There was not one breath of wind, and the smoke mounted upward like Noah's sacrifice in the picture. The human circle, revolvers in hand, grouped round the burning fiery furnace waiting to see if any one of the victims would attempt to break cover. For a minute it seemed as though they had elected to stand and be

burned to cinders, when suddenly the door—already charred to a red heat—fell with a crash, and some half dozen human beings, blackened and seared, burst forth, leaping, gasping, and shrieking with agony.

"Down with them," yelled Judge Potterer. "No tarnation quarter. Give it to the blackguards, citizens!"

But there was no need to hound on these pulque-primed Yankees. Before the wretches could reach the feet of their foes to cry for mercy the death-bearing bullets, like hail, had laid every man of them low.

"Upon my honor, judge," remarked Captain Dolopy, lighting a cigar, and pocketing his revolver, "this is rather a sickening business. I'm not squeamish—but confound it—I'd give a rat a better chance than that!"

"Calc'late I would, too," responded the judge, dryly. "A rat, sir, is a respectable varmint."

Scarcely had this somewhat unhandsome comparison escaped his lips than a few more of the unfortunate Irishmen contrived to find the sole exit from the blazing edifice. They, however, were too burned to do more than stagger a few yards and drop, writhing in pitiable tortures.

"Shall we fire, judge?" asked Benito, laughing wildly.

Judge Potterer took a hurried glance at these agonized human beings, and made a response in the negative. "It is not necessary, I reckon," he observed, with his tongue in his cheek, "to protect the citizens against smoked bacon. Let the 'coons frizzle—some—till they stop."

"Ugh!" groaned Dolopy, turning away, "that spectacle is one too many for a Britisher's stomach. Has anybody got any brandy?"

"Any more to come?" inquired Benito, with dry emphasis, addressing himself to the raging store. There were not. Indeed the groans and shrieks, the stifled, unearthly noises, the awful silence which succeeded as the flames by degrees ceased to roar and crackle, told their own tale. A store of sugar, spirit, and petroleum was soon reduced to ashes, a portion whereof represented all that remained of the sinned against though sinning Irishmen—good fellows had they been better handled.

"Marmyon," whispered Dolopy, at length in the judge's ear. Somehow though the slaughter of these Irish miners, apart from its concomitant horrors, seemed of little significance in his eyes, the fate of the heir of a huge property aroused his keenest interest. People of the Dolopy type firmly believe, as an article of faith, that the owner *in esse* or *in posse* of a name and estate is *ipso facto* different from common clay.

"You bet," was the grim response.

Then as the flames subsided the women, who hitherto had been looking on, scared at this scene of fire and blood, by degrees began to cry and moan, and at last one, a widow like the rest, and a young widow, too, who had lost the love of her life, crept up to a groaning, agonized Irishman, and tearing off portions of her dress, applied the fragments to the wretch's wounds. Soon another followed her example, hastening to the aid of a dying man, while a third ran and borrowed water to assuage the raging thirst of the sufferers. The

Yankees also seemed half ashamed, for by twos and threes they strayed afield to make their way back with all speed to Long Camp. To be candid, while they had got their revenge, even their brutalized natures had had quite enough of it.

"I'd give a pot of dollars," muttered Captain Dolopy to Billy Benito, "to know for certain whether that cuss Marmyon was in that store!"

"And that, sir, you never will know as long as you live on this airth—unless the cuss turns up somewheres else, and that's not likely, for he'd be bound to stick to Pat Frayney, and go with the gang."

"But was Frayney there?"

"Not a doubt of it, sir. It would have been worth Frayney's life to desert his comrades at that crisis."

Captain Dolopy's voice shook just a trifle as he whispered, "And you think, Benito, that both Marmyon and Frayney have perished?"

"That, sir, is my calcilation. But to-morrow, after the fire is quite out, you can search for any token of either of them, if, sir, that is your pleasure."

"I'll send over to-morrow to inquire," remarked Dolopy, as he mounted his horse. "To stop in this atmosphere of burned bacon to-night would, I think, be a trifle too unwholesome. So, Mr. Benito, I'll get off before sunset, and you may accept my congratulations that this business has gone off so satisfactorily."

Ride the captain did, as though he were riding a flat race, with Nemesis behind him, oblivious altogether of Judge Potterer, who in fact decided to remain for the night in Yatkuma, nominally to protect the citizens against a non-existent peril—really to ascertain whether the entire gang of Irish was massacred—for his own safety's sake.

"Well," inquired Horace, with an anxious face, as, begrimed and filthy, Dolopy entered Judge Potterer's residence, and unpleasantly interrupted his peaceful evening meal, "and what's become of the Irish?"

"There are no Irish!" replied the captain.

"And—" in a very faltering tone, "Robert Marmyon?"

"There is no Robert Marmyon!"

Horace turned ashy pale. The news somehow sounded too true to be good, rather than the reverse.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AN EPISTLE OF HORACE.

Sir Robert and Lady Marmyon, *tête-à-tête* in the library, were indulging one forenoon, about three weeks after the events recorded in the last chapter, in one of those polite squabbles where, in cultured circles, the combatants find it very difficult to keep the buttons on their foils, or the semblance of temper.

The subject of contention happened to be that pretty child, Polly Williams, a pet aversion of the *passé* aristocrat.

"E—er—ah," fumed the baronet, "I really feel very posed to

know what ought to be done. With my normal quixotic impetuosity, I went and promised—er—ah—Robert that I would look after the girl, and I hear now she's disappeared. What ought one to do in such a case, as a man of honor?"

"Bear it with resignation," remarked her ladyship.

"Er—ah—yes. Er—ah—no. The fellow will come back and say, 'You pledged your solemn word no harm should come to the girl, and I left her in your charge on that condition. What happens? I go to the ends of the earth in obedience to your behest, and—'"

"I'm sure he wouldn't say 'behest,'" interrupted Lady Marmyon. "That is a sort of word which never would escape the lips of a barbarian."

"Er—ah—it's of no earthly consequence how, or in what language the fellow would put it. What concerns me is, that he would accuse me of a flagrant breach of faith. There's the rub, my dear."

"A double and the rub," smiled her ladyship, blandly.

"Er—ah. Excuse me," said Sir Robert, bridling. "This is not a subject for levity. This poor little girl—"

"Poor little animal!" scoffed my lady with upturned nose.

"Well, she certainly is very pretty."

"Indeed! I was not aware that she had captivated my husband—as well as my—my—hem, son!"

"Nonsense! Er—ah—pardon me, that savors of the species of *mauvaise plaisanterie* my intelligence fails to appreciate. I was about to remark that this poor little girl, having lost her heart to Robert, has suddenly and inexplicably levanted—where Heaven knows, and why Heaven knows. I suppose I must employ detectives to run her to earth and bring her back home. And so this freak of hers will cost me a clear hundred pounds. It's er—ah—"

"Quite too silly with the tenants demanding ten per cent. reduction on the last half-year's rent to dream of wasting money on any such wild-goose chase."

"But—er—ah—how in the name of all that's disagreeable am I to meet—er—ah—Robert?"

"Why, with fortitude. You have no fortitude."

"I beg your pardon. From my boyhood upward I have been always accredited with pluck."

"Moral courage, I mean. You have always been deficient in moral courage."

"Er—ah, really, you are complimentary. I might urge that when everybody lost his head about this business—er—ah—of Planny being supposititious, I alone kept mine, and did the right thing."

"Indeed! I thought that my advice solved the problem."

"Absurd, my dear. You—er—ah—forget. Your memory is—er—ah—not at all what it used to be."

"I wish your manliness had lasted as long as my memory, for your own sake, Robert, of course!"

"My manliness? Don't I desire to do the manly thing in regard to this tiresome little girl, Williams?"

"I really cannot perceive the manliness of squandering money on a village slut."

"Well, upon my honor. I—er—never, never in my life, Lady

Marmyon, found you before so totally—er—ah—dead to all considerations of—"

At that precise moment, however, when my lady was growing intolerably insolent, and Sir Robert irritated beyond all expression, Mercury intervened to announce Mr. Orphrey.

"Aha!" cried the baronet, in a trice smoothing the clustered wrinkles on his brow, and advancing to meet the village padre with all the bonhomie in the world, "and how is our worthy shepherd? Here, my dear Orphrey, is one of your flock who persists in overdoing it. Lady Marmyon has no stamina to speak of, and yet she is so hardy as to go to balls two nights in succession. The result, as you perceive, is she is fairly knocked up."

Mr. Orphrey smiled—or, rather, essayed to smile. "I am sorry for that," he said, offering his threadbare hand to her ladyship, "because it renders my task doubly difficult; indeed, perhaps I ought, under the circumstances, to defer it."

Lady Marmyon opened her pale eyes. The priest had evidently something out of the common to impart, and her quick perception detected this by his agitated manner.

"Pray, Mr. Orphrey," she faltered, "do nothing of the kind. I am perfectly well, and quite as strong as usual. It is Sir Robert's way, you know, to imagine that I'm ill when I fail to rise to the level of his typical dairy-maid. But, unfortunately for us poor women, we can't all be rustic beauties."

This, of course, was a cut at Polly Williams, and a back-hander at the too solicitous Sir Robert, but Mr. Orphrey did not appreciate its double edge, for he proceeded quietly to deliver himself.

"The fact is," he said, speaking oracularly as one who has thought over his words beforehand and is primed accordingly—"the fact is, I have had a letter, a rather important letter, from abroad—from America. You will, perhaps, be surprised when I tell you that it comes from a gentleman with whom I have but the slightest acquaintance, a relation, I fancy, of Lady Marmyon."

"Horace St. Vincent," ejaculated Sir Robert.

"You anticipate me. He writes from—ahem—San Francisco, the beautiful city dedicated to Saint Francis of Assisi—and he writes at some length."

"I hope he is quite well," remarked Lady Marmyon, to fill up an awkward pause, Mr. Orphrey being painfully unable to proceed with his recital.

"Oh, yes. At least not very well; poor fellow; he seems to have had a severe shock."

"A shock!" cried Sir Robert, impetuously. "Good gracious, my dear Orphrey, can't you come to the point? You have news to tell. Bad news?"

"Kindly, Sir Robert, permit me to tell my tale in my own way, for Lady Marmyon's sake."

"Er—ah—yes," responded the baronet, curtly.

"And, Mr. Orphrey, pray do not regard my nerves," observed Lady Marmyon, "I can bear—anything."

The vicar gazed for a second at the pale aristocratic features of the wife and mother, but he could not convince himself of her nerve, so he continued to beat about the bush.

"Mr. St. Vincent, it appears, with Mr. Robert Marmyon, and a certain Captain Dolopy, whom I have a sort of indistinct recollection of, have been exploiting—that is the correct terminology, I think—exploiting the mineral regions of California."

"How charming!" murmured my lady.

"Quite so—in regard of the fauna and flora, the skies, the scenery, and—and all except the inhabitants. 'Only man is vile' seems to be, from Mr. St. Vincent's graphic description, a truism in the highest degree applicable to California, and indeed in the entire Southern States."

Again a pause to enable good Mr. Orphrey to collect himself.

"And what happened?" suggested impatient Sir Robert, walking across to the window.

"Too much, I fear, to be capable of being crystallized in a word or in a sentence. Mr. Robert Marmyon, so I gather from this letter, fell in with a party of miners—Irishmen, in fact; these fellows, I conclude, must have picked a quarrel with the Americans of the locality, and the affair terminated by the explosion of the mine. Mr. St. Vincent assures me that both he and his friend Captain Dolopy did their very utmost to endeavor to detach Mr. Robert Marmyon from this most unfortunate association, but he was headstrong, and—if I am to quote the actual epithet employed by Mr. St. Vincent—intractable. Of course, after such an outrage as the explosion of a mine, which caused the death of five American miners, the feud between the Irish and American factions resolved itself into a war *à l'outrance*, and equally, I regret to add, of course, the aggressors, the Irish, were, in the struggle which ensued, overpowered."

"And Robert, I imagine, must have been overpowered with his Irish congeners," remarked Lady Marmyon, with an amount of *sang froid*, amounting to utter callousness.

Mr. Orphrey looked puzzled how to reply.

"Is that the case?" demanded Sir Robert, eagerly.

"Perhaps," faltered the clergyman, "I had better read verbatim that part of Mr. Horace St. Vincent's letter. Let me see. Here it is on page four:

"'Poor Robert left us, without a note of warning as to his intentions, to breakfast with one Frayney, the ringleader of the Irish gang, and with him and another subsequently walked to the mine. That was early in the morning. The fatal explosion did not take place till noon, but immediately after it occurred neither Robert nor a single Irishman of the entire gang could be found on the spot. The local magistrate, with Captain Dolopy, departed at once for Yatkuma, a neighboring station, where the Irish were reported to be massed in force. I remained behind in the vain hope of tracing the whereabouts of the poor fellow among the placers, now deserted by the miners, who were bent on exacting an awful Nemesis for this diabolical deed. On arrival at Yatkuma, a sort of pitched battle seems to have been fought between the rival factions. The Irish, outnumbered, retreated to the store, the largest building on the station, and defended themselves with their traditional heroism. But the odds were too heavily against them. The Yankees fired the store, and those of the Irish party who escaped from the flames were

instantly shot down by their infuriated antagonists. Dolopy, sickened at the sight of such cruel butchery, returned with all speed to me, in hopes that Robert had not been so wrong-headed as to cast in his lot with these murderous Irish miners. You may imagine the dear good fellow's horror when he discovered that Robert was missing, and had in all human probability perished in the conflagration of which he himself had been the unwilling witness. I thought he would have gone mad; I was scarcely less concerned for my own mental equilibrium. The thought, however, that so much depended on me and my efforts nerved me. I could not sleep—that I need hardly say—but at earliest daybreak I rode with all speed to Yatkuma. The embers of the store were still smoldering. A subsequent search among them did not reveal any trace of Robert, but, providentially, I succeeded in finding half-alive, half-dead, in a miner's cabin, a man named O'Flaherty. He was not one of Frayney's gang, but kept the store, and seems to have rushed forth fearfully burned from the enveloping flames, and to have dropped immediately. But for that he would, like the others, have been shot dead. As it was he escaped for the nonce to die, however, subsequently from the effects of the fire. When first I interviewed the poor man he was unconscious, but afterward he had a brief lucid interval, and in response to my queries he gave me to understand that a stranger answering to the description of Robert was actually in his house, and in the act of drinking a bottle of wine when the attack commenced. Before wiring or writing this grievous intelligence to Sir Robert and Lady Marmyon, I felt it to be a paramount duty to institute the most stringent and general inquiries in all possible directions, and to advertise in the chief newspapers throughout the United States. This prolonged search hitherto has not added one iota to my stock of information, and I am therefore, with the bitterest reluctance, compelled to add that I shall esteem it the greatest of personal favors if you will break this distressing intelligence to the poor fellow's bereaved parents. I cannot and shall not return home without making one additional, though I feel abortive, effort to trace him, and this not merely for his father's but for his own sake. His was a manly, magnanimous, and lovable nature. He took up the cause of the Irish with all the unselfish chivalry of a Marmyon, and if he was not in manner or by education exactly cultured, the accident of his earlier associations could not affect the innate nobility of his breed. Had he lived, I am persuaded he would have been a son of whom any gentleman might well have been proud, and in him I feel that I have lost a very dear friend. Give my love and sincere condolence to Sir Robert and Lady Marmyon, and with every apology to yourself, believe me yours in deep sorrow,

"'HORACE ST. VINCENT.

"'P. S.—I will ask you to tell Sir Robert that I have necessarily expended the entire amount he placed at my disposal in the vain search after poor Robert. Sad, indeed, that a tour which began so auspiciously should have been thus suddenly brought to a conclusion. *Sæva, sæva, necessitas!*'"

"Horace, er—ah," gulped Sir Robert, "always was the most con-

siderate of men, and it is like his forethought and good-feeling to request you, my dear friend Orphrey, to—er—ah—break this awful news to us. You too are in this affair, as you ever have proved yourself to be, the kindest and most sympathetic of parish priests." And he held out both his hands to feeble, faltering, and blushing Mr. Orphrey.

"Yes," murmured her ladyship, sweetly, "you are indeed very, very kind, and"—applying lace to her nose and pulling a *visage de circonstance*—"I'm sure we have every reason to thank you! Poor dear Robert was, as you know, almost a stranger to us both, though we recognized him quite as our son, and were fully conscious of those qualities to which my cousin Horace alludes so feelingly. But of course the blow is not, cannot be, quite as crushing as it would have been had we known the poor fellow more intimately. He has been to us, if I may say so, a bird of passage. He came into our life; he has passed from it. And—" with a profound sigh that might mean deep grief or deeper satisfaction—"doubtless it is all for the best."

"Quite so," added Sir Robert, as though all was now settled definitely, and there remained no more to be said. "And, therefore, I think we must meet the occasion with dignity. We shall, of course, my dear, decline Lord Sevenoaks' dinner-party and the lawn-tennis tournament at Grey Mount. We must put the servants into mourning, and perhaps, my dear Orphrey, you will make some appropriate allusion to the melancholy event in your sermon. I shall myself write an exact account of the wretched catastrophe to the society papers—they always blunder when they can, and—and—er—ah—I think that's all!"

Mr. Orphrey rather opened his eyes at this definition of the whole duty of a man and a father under a bereavement, but he said nothing. He at all events had done his duty to the best of his ability, and was glad enough to bow himself off the scene. Both husband and wife were quite too obviously relieved by a tragedy that to other parents would have been most heart-rending, and the good clergyman hardly appreciated this thinly veiled exhibition of callous indifference. To his mind it was inhuman and unchristian, though he did not esteem it a matter of obligation to inform either of them of his candid opinion.

Sir Robert, with his strict regard for the unities, could not but wire for Errol, who was in town enjoying himself up to the hilt in a sort of fashion that would not have been accorded the warm approbation of Mr. Orphrey, or indeed of any Agnostic gifted with moral sense. Quitting the more congenial society of Venus, Bacchus, Momus *et Cie*, this admirable young gentleman promptly responded to the paternal mandate, and duly put in an appearance at the solemn seven o'clock feed, his features toned down to the occasion.

"My dear Errol," said Sir Robert, "I am—er—ah—glad that you have had the good taste to return to your home at this sad crisis. It would be affectation to suppose that you are profoundly affected by an event which has plunged our family in—er—ah—conventional sorrow, but you are acting in the best taste by preserving a proper appearance. We owe it as a duty to ourselves, my dear boy, to our

position, to society, and to the unfortunate man whom we have lost, to endeavor to drop the—er—ah—tributary tear."

"Especially," whispered, funereally, my lady, "because the blow has fallen upon us without a note of warning!"

Errol smiled grimly. "That," said he, "is my fault. I didn't care to tell you, because I thought it might be contradicted; but I had a wire of this news quite three weeks ago."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"THE WIDOW'S MITES."

In other localities, and in some, too, even more superb than Marmyon Court, if you want the earliest intelligence avoid the front stairs. Filtration begins at the other side of the house, and the servants' hall enjoys a monopoly both of vintage wines and accurate information which the *salon* commonly lacks. For example, while the library, supposed to be the center of all news affecting the great house of Marmyon, was absolutely and entirely ignorant of Robert's fate, it had reached the ear of Polly Williams, and was ancient history in the solemn sanctum of Hester Mazebrook.

The news, however, which threw a hypocritical shade over the Court, did not affect Polly quite in the same ratio. It gravitated to her ear through Horace's wire to Errol, which document careful and professionally inquisitive Mrs. Mazebrook discovered by diligent search in one of Errol's pockets, and subsequently—perhaps to relieve her mind of being the sole possessor of a secret—revealed in the strictest confidence to Polly. The telegram ran thus:

"*From Horace St. Vincent, Burlbec's Hotel, San Francisco, to Errol Marmyon, Panurge Club, Pall Mall, London, S. W.*

"Believe Robert ended. *Sursum corda.* You are heir. More anon."

A glance at that telegram told the terrified girl that there had been something approximating to foul play, and sent her home to think. There was, however, no tear visible in those lovely eyes of hers. They burned with the fierce raging heat of a righteous wrath; they did not as yet melt into sorrow. In her agony of pent-up feeling she hurried first of all to Belinda Hodge, in quest of the sympathy her soul yearned after.

"I wouldn't take on so, Pol, if I was you," drearily responded that matter-of-fact young woman, indulging in a cavernous yawn. "Robert he'd gave you the go-by, he had, and there bain't no good in frettin' arter him. If he'd a-lived he'd a-bin bound to marry one of them great ladies, and now he's dead he can't do that. If I was you, Pol, I'd find a consolation in that thought. He bain't yourn, that's true, but he bain't nobody else's."

Polly Williams administered a look—such a look of anguish and rebuke—in return for this cold-blooded speech; then she turned on her heel in silence—she had asked for bread and had been offered a stone. She had not walked a dozen steps away from that vulgar temple of the village bacchanals when a tottering step followed her,

and a croaking noise, as of some one choking, arrested her attention.

"Do'ee stop! I be that rheumatic and hard of breath I can't go no furder, Pol. Ugh!"

"What is it, Widow Gipps?" inquired Polly, her accents none the less musical for being so toned to a minor key.

"What be wrong with my Robert?" croaked the old woman.

Polly's eyes flashed like a duchess's sapphires in the full blaze of the electric light. She seemed for the nonce unable to answer, and when she did find her voice it seeemd hollow and uncanny.

"I'll tell you, Mrs. Gipps," she said: "the people up at the Court there, they didn't know what to do with the poor fellow. Hester Mazebrook says that my lady called him a white elephant, though what her meant by that I doesn't know; but little good, I be bound. It ain't a easy thing, however, to get rid of a man in this yere country, what with the perleece, and the law, and the assizes, and all that; so they catches hold of him when his temper's gone wrong about that deceitful Irish chap, and they overpersuades him to go away to Ameriky, they does, where, as I suppose, there bain't no laws at all, and no perleece, nor any of them things; and, Mrs. Gipps, they've gone and doned for him, jist as I was sartain sure they would, from what I heered tell before! He's dead, Mrs. Gipps, that he be, and that there willin, Errol Marmyon, he be the next lord of this place. Dead, Mrs. Gipps, I tell 'ee!"

"Do you go to think all that's true?" faltered Widow Gipps.

"Think, mum! Ain't I seed the telegram?. Ain't I seed with my own heyes the words, 'Robert ended, and you're'—that's that there wicked Errol—'you're the heir?' Missus Gipps, there's them as deserves to be hanged wus nor them as is hanged; but what can poor folks do against money?"

Mrs. Gipps trembled all over. "He were my bo-oy," she whimpered; "I brought 'im up by 'and, I did, Pol, and he were a nice thing, he were."

"Yes," cried Polly, a tear darting to her eye—a tear of sympathy—for this old woman, unlike Miss Belinda, was her real partner in sorrow. "Yes, Robert were what I may call a nat'ral gentleman. Not one of them as is overfed and 'aughty, but a downright straight one, with a 'eart of gold and a 'ead fit for a bishop. But there—what's the good of talking, Mrs. Gipps—he stood in the light of them as was ashamed of him, and they've wiped him out, poor chap, as you might a insect."

"Are you sure of that, Polly Williams?"

"How can I think t'other way, Mrs. Gipps?"

"Ay, ay, ay! You've got the knack, you have, Pol, and no wonder; but keep the 'air on yer 'ead, young woman, and keep it cool. Suppose, my gal, this yere story's a lie?"

"If I thought that," cried Polly, "I'd go to Ameriky somehows or other, to satisfy myself. Bless 'ee, Mrs. Gipps, they gits across the seas in a matter of ten days, as I read in our Sunday's paper, I did, so it can't be impossible to find a way somehows over there. A gal as ain't above work ought to be able to earn her ticket and keep. Maybe they washes the gentle people's clothes as they be on the

voyage, and if so they must have washerwomen, mustn't they, Mrs. Gipps? I've a mind to try it, I has."

The old woman regarded Polly steadfastly. Then she muttered, as one thinking aloud, "Tut, tut. 'Tain't no use. She ain't got the grit for that. Besides—"

"What's that you're a-sayin' on?" demanded Polly. "I ain't got no grit?"

"Not for what come into my 'ead, Pol."

"And what was that, then, Mrs. Gipps?"

"I were a-thinkin', Pol, that if you was to go to Ameriky you might learn the truth."

"Of course I might. Of course I should, too."

"But Ameriky's a biggish country, I heerd tell. What were the name of the town, now, where Robert were took to by them vicked willins?"

"San Frankisko."

"Are you sure of that, Pol? Acause 'twouldn't never do to make no mistake."

"What do you mean, Mrs. Gipps? Whatever be it you be a-drivin' at?"

Mrs. Gipps, instead of replying, hobbled away, but Polly, following the old woman, walked alongside of her with the air of one who would not be repulsed.

"What be drivin' at, mum? Can't you answer a person?"

"Bain't sartain, gal. You mind your own business, and I'll mind mine."

Polly walked a dozen yards in silence, nettled not a little by this curt reply; then she slowly dropped behind, and turned away with a sigh.

In another minute, however, the voice of the old crone again called after her, and she perceived the bent and rheumatic form of the aged widow approaching her, so she retraced her steps.

"Pol," gasped Mrs. Gipps, "it are to be. You've made up your mind that you'd go arter him to Ameriky or anywhere else, if so be as you could. Be that so?"

"If I could, Mrs. Gipps."

"Then, Polly, my gal, I'll do my share. I be too old and broken to travel miles across the sea. It would kill I, and then the money would be throw'd away. But you're different. You're young and 'earty, and able to face the danger and the toil and all that. You'd be pertected, too, against mischief, I'll be bound, on account of your good looks; besides you're modest and decent, let alone your bein' in love, which is the best warrant for a gal's going straight, as I knows on. Well, Pol, you can go, and, though you mayn't think it, my gal, I've got the money for 'ee."

"You, Mrs. Gipps?"

"Yes, gal, me. When Hester Mazebrook carried that there baby to my cottage to be brought up by 'and, I got a round sum for the job from Sir Robert. That I spent. But beyond the weekly money for the child's keep, which Hodge paid punctually—he never knowed, poor chap, as our Robert weren't his own flesh and blood, for Martha never dared tell him—the foolish feller—'tis Hodge as I means, Pol—he give I the twenty pounds Sir Robert paid him. It

might have been pride as pervented his keepin' his master's money, for there weren't never no love lost betwixt 'em; or it might have been gratitude to I for havin' nussed the bo-oy so careful—anyhow, Pol, he brought the money accordin' to promise, twenty golden sovereigns, and I have kep' 'em all these years for Robert. I did think, Pol, as I might have given them to the poor fellow on his weddin' day, but that weren't to be. Many's the time I've been tempted to dip into them sovereigns for my own needs, but I'd made up my mind I'd try the workhouse fust, Pol, and there ain't one of 'em as is touched. I be old and failin', my gal, a long bit o' the wrong side of fourscore. 'Tain't in natur' that I shall last much longer, and if I does last the House be good enough for the likes of I. So, my gal, you come with me, and I'll pay the ticket and back to Ameriky, with summat for wittles along the road, if you be agreeable to go."

Polly turned pale for a second only—it was but the surprise—then her eyes sparkled, as she whispered, "Mrs. Gipps, I'll leave this very day. And don't you go to tell 'em what's become of me, or they'll set after me quick and bring me back. Don't tell father, mother, Belinda—nobody. If you were to drop so much as a 'int, it 'ud be up at the Court in less nor a half hour, and they'd telegraph after me—no fear! So, Mrs. Gipps—mum's the word, please—and you trust me to find my way and take care of my skin."

The bargain thus hastily struck was as quickly ratified. Widow Gipps extracted from a hole in her chimney the all-precious twenty sovereigns, and Polly, having sewed up nineteen of them within the lining of her bodice and pocketed the odd one, went home, packed up her clothes in a compact bundle, and returning to Mrs. Gipps's all but disused habitation—for it will be remembered the old soul was permanently employed at the Marmyon Arms—borrowed pen, ink, and paper. Then she sat down with difficulty to compose a valedictory letter to her mother, to be handed to that worthy woman after her departure from her old and loved home.

This effusion ran thus:

"Mi dearest Mother,—I du hopes you won't take on acause I've goned away. I bain't goned arter no harm, and it's the odds as I comes back agin, though I be agoin' a longish journey. Don't go to ast no questions about me, acause it 'tain't no use, for what I'm adoin' of I be adoin' of my own free will and not nohow at nobody's instergation. If it warn't as I be sure, I be, that you and father would worrit, I should not feel the partin' so bitter as I now does, but 'tain't nohow onpossible but as what it may come right in the long run, for I means to do what's proper, and be a good girl though I be away from home, and 'cept 'tis acause I leaves without a word to no one, you need not never feel ashamed of your lovin' dorter, Polly.

"Give a kiss, mother, to the little uns and to father from me if he'll have it, and don't go to fret, for indede there bain't not nothin' to fret about, 'cept 'tis that I be a'most crushed by wot I heerd about Robert. But that won't make I forgit my dooty, dear mother."

It might have been half-past eight the same evening when Widow Gipps knocked gingerly at the door of Shepherd Williams's cottage.

"You can come in, whoever you be," murmured the sulky voice of Mrs. Williams. "Why, bless my 'eart alive, if it bain't Mrs. Gipps!"

"Thank you, Missus Williams, it be, and I be for owin' of an apology to you, but 'tain't my fault neither. The customers at the Marmyon Arms come in so thick, and business be that brisk that it's as much as I could do to slip away. But I do go to confess, mum, that your Polly, mum, she—"

"Where be our Polly?" interrupted, curtly, the shepherd's rather rough-tongued spouse.

"What say?" rejoined judicious Widow Gipps. "I be raythor 'ard of 'earin', Mrs. Williams, bein' well nigh upon four-score-year-and-ten."

"Where be our Polly? Be she up with Belinda at the pub.? I thought as them two had split?"

But Mrs. Gipps, instead of replying to this, began fumbling in her pocket, and at last extracted therefrom both Polly's epistle and a pair of spectacles, together with such trifles as a bodkin, a pen knife, and the relics of what once had been a comb, all of which she flopped on the table.

"There it be, Mrs. Williams. That's the letter as Polly give to me, it might a-bin a hour agon, it might a-bin a bit longer. Anyhow, she says, says she, Widow Gipps, she says, take that there to my mother, she says—acause I be agoin' away, or summat of that sort, Mrs. Williams. I don't remember all the gal said. However, you knows all about it, no doubt."

"Goin' away!" echoed Mrs. Williams, aghast; and in her astonishment at this communication never offering to open Polly's letter, which lay on the table before her untouched.

"Ees, mum, the gal did say as she were agoin'. Got a sitooation, I suppose. With a gentleman's family, I hopes, mum, for the gal's sake, as were always a favorite of mine."

What Mrs. Williams would have responded to this farrago of nonsense may be left to conjecture. At that moment, however, from the bar of the Marmyon Arms, where he had been swilling with the other rustics, in lurched the shepherd, with something like a hiccough, and a rather stupid expression, as of one who, in the refined technical parlance of inebriate circles, has "had his whack."

At another moment Juno would have remonstrated with Jupiter for his contumacy in pouring his children's dinners—or the substantial portion thereof—down his throat. Now, however, the good soul was too agitated to nag. Great misfortunes commonly reduce trifles to their proper proportion.

"Father," said she, gravely, "our Pol's gone!"

"Well," grunted the shepherd. "Then—hic—let her stop there!"

"But," shrilled the woman, "you don't understand me. Our Pol's gone, and—well, I may as well read her letter. P'r'aps she say where she've gone to."

"She never bin and drowned herself?" growled the shepherd, during the pause consequent on his wife's attempt to decipher Polly's cacography.

"No," faltered Mrs. Williams, "that ain't it. The gal's took on about Robert, as is but nat'ral, though the fellow have give her

the go-by. But she don't talk about sooercide, nor nuffin of that. In fack, blest if I can make out what she do mean."

"Here," muttered Shepherd Williams, "give I the letter, wife. Women ain't never no good."

But it Mrs. Williams had obtained an inkling of Polly's drift, the honest shepherd, his eyesight by no means clearer owing to the public-house grains of paradise, could not do as much. Impatiently he flung the scrap of paper on the table with: "Gal's gone. Where to? None of us knows. That's about it; ain't it, Widder Gipps?"

"She said as she were agoin' away," remarked that sagacious octogenarian in response.

"It's all about Robert," whimpered Mrs. Williams,

"Well," snorted her husband, "and eggs is eggs and chickens is chickens. What be the good of tellin' I that twice two's fower, when I knows it aforehand. In coorse, 'tis Robert's misfortin' as has upset the gal's head, and made her as wild, I be bound, as a cow as has lost her calf. But that don't help us. Pol's took her hook, wife, and when a young gal of her looks takes her hook, why —there's no sayin'."

"No more there ain't," chimed in Mrs. Williams, "and I wish I knowed where to find her."

"I means to have a try," rejoined Williams. "To-morrer mornin' I goes to the Court, and if Sir Robert's in the mind I thinks him to be, he'll mighty soon trace the gal, and send her back home. He did ought to, that he did."

"If I was you, shepherd," interposed Mrs. Gipps, "I would not go to bother the squire. He might cut up rough."

"No, mum," rejoined the shepherd, "he mightn't, and 'twould be silly of him so to do. My supper, wife."

And, as we know, the shepherd did lay his information at the Court.

CHAPTER XL.

MRS. FRANKALMOIGN'S FINESSE.

As may be surmised, the intelligence conveyed to the Court from Horace St. Vincent, per Mr. Orphrey, quite obliterated all thought of Polly Williams and her destiny. The baronet, true to his theory of the first duty of man being to play his part on the stage of life on the strict lines of that part, arrayed himself in conventional sable, elongated his visage, and demanded all the outward and visible signs of the intensest grief from his dependents. For the nonce, too, he and his wife dropped out of society, and were supposed to indulge in the luxury of mourning in strict solitude. But while thus rigorously observing the stern enactments of the social code, Sir Robert was the busiest of the busy. The wires kept flying between Marmyon Court and San Francisco. Every effort was made and no expense spared to try and trace the missing heir. The American embassador, for the time being, at the Court of St. James was impressed into this service, and the American police and press alike were requisitioned. All, however, to no purpose. Not one scintilla of evidence could be obtained to show what had become of Robert; but Benito swore readily an affidavit before Judge Potterer, to the

effect that in his judgment the young man must have perished in the flames of the Yatkuma store.

This affidavit was also further strengthened by an expression of opinion on the part of the English Embassador at Washington as to the account given by Benito being verifiable; and, in short, after a brief three weeks, both Sir Robert, his wife, and Errol Marmyon made up their minds conclusively that Robert was no more, and Errol posed as the heir to the title and estate, to the very great content of his mother, if not of his sire.

Under the circumstances, that fortune-favored young gentleman abandoned all notion of competing for a fellowship, and in fact dismissed study of all sorts as the badge of servitude and youngership. In lieu thereof he plunged into the vortex of dissipation—that polite euphemism for vice—and to keep the ball rolling had recourse, after the manner of his class, to those obliging vampires, the children of Israel.

This was necessary. So long as there remained one spark of incertitude as to Robert's destiny, the insurance companies would not advance a fraction on his reversion. Old Jewry, however, was not so disobliging. Old Jewry will always lend on usurious terms, more particularly when the risk appears to be little more than nominal.

Errol, by the bye, though he was rapidly developing from the sensually brutal into the brutally sensual, was, in matters of business, no fool. He realized quite fully the unwisdom of plunging to any and every tune, and cast about for a heavy loan on ordinary terms, offering the City jackals a big commission if some such arrangement could be negotiated.

At last a gentleman named Squidd, who seemed to spend existence in pacing the streets of the metropolis at racing speed, called on him at the Panurge Club, with the pleasing intelligence that a client of a personal friend of his happened to have the sum of £50,000 to invest at eight per cent., and might be manipulated.

Errol remarked, *sotto voce*, that eight was as great an improvement on eighty as thous. were on tens, and forthwith champagned the aforesaid Squidd into confidence, the upshot being an appointment to meet the principal's solicitor, Mr. Hubble.

The appointment came off at the office of that limb of the law in Lincoln's Inn Fields, Mr. Squidd condescending to assist by his presence. As thus:

MR. SQUIDD, waving his hand at Errol: "This, Mr. 'Ubble, is the gentleman I named for the £50,000. Mr. H'errol Marmyon, Mr. 'Enry 'Ubble. Mr. 'Enry 'Ubble, Mr. H'errol Marmyon."

MR. HUBBLE, after a three minutes' stare: "Yes."

MR. SQUIDD, apologetically: "I thought it advisable, Mr. 'Ubble, to bring Mr. Marmyon on, in order to save time, and to enable him to state his own case."

MR. HUBBLE, suddenly awaking as from a charmed dream: "Yes. Pray be seated, sir. My old friend, Mr.— What's your name? I forget."

MR. SQUIDD, interpolating: "Squidd."

MR. HUBBLE: "Ah, yes, of course; I shall forget my own name next. My old friend, Squish—"

MR. SQUIDD, aggrievedly: "Squidd."

MR. HUBBLE, continuing, "Squidd, of course. Squidd told me, sir, that you wished to raise a certain sum on your reversionary interest, and it so happens that I am acquainted with the facts of the case, not only through the press, but more particularly owing to information received from a lady who, I may say, is not a client of mine, but with whom I have had business transactions."

ERROL, with an interested air: "And who, may I ask, is this lady who knows all about my affairs?"

MR. HUBBLE: "I ought not, perhaps, to mention names, but as I have an appointment to keep, and time is an object to me to-day, I will be frank. I allude, sir, to Mrs. Frankalmoign. Now, Mr. Errol Marmyon, to come to the point, your security rests on the presumption that your elder brother has ceased to exist. There is no proof forthcoming of that. Ergo, sir, your security *per se* is not worth a brass nail, and I couldn't advise a client to lend on it. But, sir, while there is no proof of your having an absolute reversionary interest in the Marmyon estate, there exists a strong probability, approximating to a certainty, that you will inherit should you survive your father. Under the circumstances I could arrange for the advance of £50,000—but only on one condition."

ERROL: "Name it."

MR. HUBBLE: "That Mrs. Frankalmoign becomes your surety. You start, Mr. Errol. There is, however, no need for concealment. I believe—that is to say, I will undertake—that Mrs. Frankalmoign shall do this. Being in that lady's confidence, I may tell you that she entertains an ambition of her own—a very natural one, perhaps, for a mother. It is, in plain English, that her only child shall marry well—rank, money, and all the rest of it. You have, therefore, only to settle terms with the lady and, of course, the daughter, and —well, sir, the business can be completed in a few hours."

MR. SQUIDD: "Business-like that, Mr. H'errol?"

ERROL, with a smile: "I thought Mrs. Frankalmoign was in Paris."

MR. HUBBLE: "She is at present residing at 178 Berkeley Street, Mayfair. At least she was there yesterday."

ERROL, rising: "Thanks. You shall hear from me as soon as I have seen her. Yes, Mr. Squidd, this does sound like business. Good-morning, gentlemen."

As soon as he left the lawyer's office, Errol chartered a cab, and drove with all speed to Berkeley Street. It was a little after noon, so that he felt tolerably sure of finding the gay widow *chez lui*, though whether he would be admitted was more a matter for conjecture, ladies of her type being invisible before luncheon. He was admitted, and presently Mrs. Frankalmoign put in an appearance, looking, as he fancied, older and rather worried withal.

"So," cried she, "I must congratulate you! Who would have imagined that the chapter of accidents was going to end in this way? Well, Ida will be charmed to see you when you care to call."

"Isn't she in town?" inquired Errol.

"Oh yes. But just now she is in the arms of her *modiste*. I think you will find her improved. I ought not to say so, but really

she is quite the prettiest girl of the season, though not a *belle*, don't you know?"

Errol smiled. "If she be not kind to me, what care I how fair she be?" he muttered, half in soliloquy.

"Oh!" replied Mrs. Frankalmoign, archly, "but you were always a prime favorite."

"By the bye," remarked Errol, "I met this morning one of your satellites, a lawyer named Hubble; rather a clever man, I thought. Am I right?"

"Oh yes; Mr. Hubble is very shrewd. He is not my lawyer, but I had to consult him about some business matters of my poor husband."

"Yes. I want the man to raise the wind for me. Of course I'm speaking in confidence."

"I should think," replied the lady demurely, "he was quite able to facilitate any such arrangement."

"He says he can do it, but on terms only."

"What terms, my dear Errol?" and the diplomatic lady came and set herself by him on the sofa.

"Well, to be frank, he dragged you into the affair."

"Dragged me?"

"Yes. He will make me the advance, so he says, and on very reasonable conditions, too; but he wants you to be a party to the transaction. Let me explain. He knows, or has got to know, somehow, that I once upon a time set my heart on Ida, and that Ida —ahem—was disposed to favor my suit, even when I was not a highly eligible *parti*. Consequently, he seems to have hit upon a sort of idea that everything—pecuniary, matrimonial, and legal—might be arranged simultaneously."

"To be perfectly candid," responded Mrs. Frankalmoign, after a slight pause, "I must plead guilty to a little surreptitious match-making. As you know, I am, and have been for some years past, a *persona grata* at Marmyon, and the alliance would be acceptable to me. I wish it, Errol. I will do all I can, too, if you wish it, to forward it. But—"

"What is the hitch?"

"Ida does not quite know her own mind. Six months ago you came, you saw, you conquered, and you lost. Don't blame me for that; blame yourself. You will now have to revive those first impressions, and perhaps at some disadvantage, for Ida has seen other faces besides yours, and, though she is free, still she has a will of her own."

"She will not refuse me."

"I hope not. But now about this loan. What is the amount you are anxious to borrow?"

"Fifty thousand."

"A very large sum. Too large, my friend, for prudence."

"It pays my debts; it gives me funds in hand; it relieves me of the necessity of borrowing again."

"Quite so. But, Errol, there is a certain risk about suretyship which I do not half relish. I will do this, however; I will become your surety, but you must deposit half the amount with my bankers

until Ida and you have actually agreed to join your fate; perhaps I had better put it, until the knot is tied."

Errol pondered for a moment. It occurred to his recollection that, on his return to England, Horace St. Vincent would want money, possibly a large amount, and that to break faith with that very unscrupulous accomplice of his would be rather risky. Granted that he might demur to handing over a large sum till proof was adduced of Robert being no more, still in any event Horace would demand plunder, and must have it. He felt a trifle bamboozled, and was at a loss for a reply.

"I can not vary those terms," remarked the widow, with a singularly disagreeable expression in an eye that once had been lustrous. "If I hold a substantial guarantee of your honorable intentions toward my daughter, I am content to incur liability, of which my friends would not approve. If, of course, Ida should reject your suit, that is another affair altogether, and I shall be prepared to release your money subject to a bond safeguarding myself. But Ida is not to be pressed. You must give her all the time she asks for, and, so long as she does not absolutely and irrevocably refuse, you must be content to wait and hope. Am I clear?"

"Quite, except on one point. Is this sum of £25,000 to be paid to your bankers by way of deposit, or to your private account?"

"To my private account. You wish me to confide in you and become your surety; in return you will have to confide in me."

"I understand," drawled Errol, rather dubiously, the notion of half his cake being subtracted being much the reverse of consoling. "And if Ida should say 'No,' then I'm to have the money?"

"And if she says 'Yes' you can also have it—in the vestry of St. George's, Hanover Square. You see, my dear Errol, I am perfectly cool and business-like. I wish my daughter to be Lady Marmyon, and I know before she consents that there must be something like a struggle, inasmuch as you have foolishly damaged your chances. I must, therefore, endeavor to prevent your being dashed by a first repulse, which, I may own, I fully anticipate. I must take the strongest guarantee for your steady perseverance. That in fine is as much of my hand as I care to show. You may guess the rest, if you can, my dear Errol."

Errol smiled. He thought he could; but he couldn't; and he went away, having clinched a bargain that gave the artful widow the very leverage she wanted—a balance at her bankers.

CHAPTER XLI.

"HUBBLE-BUBBLE."

ERROL remained in town for a fortnight, calling frequently at Berkeley Street, and paying assiduous court to the fair Ida. That young lady somewhat studiously and dexterously avoided *tête-à-tête* interviews, yet seemed so he thought, rather inclined to meet him half way. He realized, however, how thoroughly the simple girl of the previous autumn had been metamorphosed into the self-possessed drawing-room beauty. Nature in her case was slowly de-

veloping into art, and whereas she had once been a toy in his hands, he now felt himself to be rather a plaything in hers.

Mr. Hubble, as is the way with his profession, could not possibly bestir himself. He had assured Errol that the matter would be easily arranged in a few hours. This limit, however, represented much more than a few days, and might also have been termed a few weeks. Nevertheless, pending the completion of arrangements, the judicious lawyer supplied our gay plunger with funds, which for the purposes of baccarat at the Panurge, and other even less mentionable delights, were then much in request.

At last, however, the hour was appointed for completion, and, accompanied by Mrs. Frankalmoign, he drove up to the lawyer's office in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Mr. Hubble appeared fussy. The clerks appeared fussy. Telegraph boys came bowling in, and clients also, who insisted urgently on being allowed five minutes, not more, of Mr. Hubble's time. In fact, the waiting-room into which the lady and gentleman were ushered savored much of pandemonium, so much so that Errol felt bothered and bamboozled, impatient and irritable.

That, perchance, was the precise result contemplated by the lawyer, who purposely kept them dancing attendance, till one at all events could have relieved his mind considerably had there been the slightest opening for full-flavored diction. No such opportunity occurring, he avenged himself on his nails and mustache, gnawing each of those parasites with fine impartiality.

Eventually Mr. Squidd entered an appearance, and then, after a brief delay, all three were ushered into Mr. Hubble's sanctum.

"The business," commenced the lawyer, nervously cracking what appeared to be an acre of parchment turned over at the bottom —"the business, Mr. Marmyon, is now complete, subject only to your signature, or rather signatures, and that of Mrs. Frankalmoign. The amount in the gross, you are aware, is £50,000. That represents the *corpus* of the loan. Of that lump sum, by your direction £25,000 has to be paid over to Mrs. Frankalmoign, who in return gives an undertaking to repay the same first, on her daughter's marriage to you; or, secondly, in the event of the said daughter contracting a marriage with a third party."

"Or," interrupted Errol, "in the event of the young lady positively refusing to marry me?"

"I think sir," remarked the lawyer, "that the clause you suggest would not be operative in equity. On the terms of the agreement you are sufficiently protected."

Errol bowed, though he bit his lip, and Mr. Hubble proceeded *ore rotundo.*

"You will, therefore, by way of preliminary sign an authorization to me to pay over the sum to Mrs. Frankalmoign. You have also to authorize me to pay Mr. Squidd the percentage of one and a quarter per cent. for negotiating this loan, and a similar sum to me for carrying it through. The law-charges amount to £181 2*s.* 3*d.* On your signing these authorizations together with the bond to the lender, Mr. Moseson, of Houndsditch, I am prepared to hand you a check for the balance."

"What is the balance?" inquired Errol, reddening.

"£23,568 17*s.* 9*d.*"

"Upon my honor!"

"Well, sir, and what, pray, is your objection?"

"I think the charge for negotiation excessive."

Had Errol at that moment been gazing at Mrs. Frankalmoign instead of the lawyer he would have felt alarmed. The blood fled from her cheek and lips, her dress heaved, and she looked as though she must inevitably faint. Fortunately for her his eyes were focused in wrath on Messrs. Hubble and Squidd, nor did he notice the signal she passed behind his back.

"We have charged you in commission," said Mr. Hubble, quietly —"that is to say, Mr. Squidd and I—only two and a half per cent. Do you object?"

"It's heavy black-mail," rejoined Errol.

"Of course," observed Mr. Hubble, "if you prefer it, the commission can be included as a separate charge on your reversionary interest, but in that case it would have to carry compound interest."

"I should prefer that arrangement."

"Very good, sir. Then if you give me a letter to that effect, I shall only have to deduct the hundred and eighty-one odd for law-charges."

"Certainly."

"You had better perhaps sign these various documents first, and you can write the letter afterward from my clerk's dictation. We must not detain Mrs. Frankalmoign unnecessarily, and she has to sign after you. May I—ahem—therefore suggest that—"

"All right," said Errol, who felt cross and nettled, under the impression that the lawyer and agent had combined to trick him. "Here, where am I to sign, if you please?"

There was not much difficulty in showing him, his signature already being outlined in pencil, so he scribbled his autograph, declared he made delivery by his act and deed, and then turning to Mrs. Frankalmoign remarked for the first time how very pale and agitated she was.

"I am afraid," he murmured, considerately, "that the heat of this office oppresses you. I suppose we shall be able to go directly."

"It is hot," mutttered Mr. Hubble, who was writing checks hard and fast. "But we need not keep you, Mrs. Frankalmoign, more than a minute longer. Kindly sign there—where your name is outlined. Thank you. Here is your check, and, Mr. Errol Marmyon, here is yours. Now, madam, pray let me see you into your carriage at once."

"Thanks," said the lady, more composedly; adding, with a glance of sweet satisfaction, to Errol, "Will you come? I think I must ask for your arm, I feel a little—ahem! all—overish, don't you know?"

Errol, rather flustered, hurried forward with her to her brougham, took his seat beside her, and at her request they drove off together, leaving the coast clear.

"Well, Squidd," remarked Mr. Hubble, "that was as near as a toucher, and it just shows the utter tomfoolery of being too grasping. The velvet paw is very well, but to show your claws—that's the dooce! The old gal's fly. See her turn pale when she thought

the young donkey was going to kick over the whole bag of tricks? My! It was ninety-nine to a hundred she'd make a clean faint of it. But she didn't, and she played our cards for us well."

"But," observed Mr. Squidd, in reply, "what about my commission? I trust to you, 'Ubble, you know."

"Why, you duffer, didn't you twig that the old gal signaled to me to deduct it from her twenty-five thou.? And I gave her a check drawn according. Will you have your money now, Squidd, or wait till next settlin' day?"

"Thank 'ee, 'Ubble," replied Mr. Squidd, meekly, "I don't mind if I 'as it on the nail."

And so Mr. Hubble wrote the check, and Mr. Squidd not only pocketed it, but invited his legal friend to a sumptuous luncheon at the Holborn Restaurant, an invitation cordially accepted, the lawyer remarking that he'd done enough business for one day.

Over the Holborn champagne, too, Mr. Hubble waxed confidential. "That young feller Marmyon," whispered he, with a nervous glance at the listening waiter, "is nasty-dispositioned, but he's not fly. He never had the wit to see that Mrs. Frankalmoign didn't sign the bond, and he never troubled to read what she did sign. He thinks she's liable for that there entire fifty thousand. But she's not, Squidd—not for a penny of it. The document she signed, my boy, was an undertaking to see me safe, in the event of Moseson, the lender, coming on me for recommending him a reversionary security that was invalid. That's the worst possible. And it's not likely to give her, or me either, much trouble, for Moseson knows the facts, and he's amply secured by insurances."

"'Ubble," gurgled Squidd, "you are a genius. With your talents, 'Ubble, a man might be anything—Prime-minister, Archbishop of Canterbury, Poet-Laureate, Lord Chancellor, President of the Royal Academy. I wish I was you."

* * * * * * *

"Mother," remarked Errol, the day following, he having been summoned to the domestic hearth to consult with his sire on the erection of some new farm buildings—"mother, do you happen to know who Mrs. Frankalmoign was before she was married?"

"Well, my dear, that's rather an awkward question. Mrs. Frankalmoign is very nice, and of course she had the good luck to marry a man of family and fortune. But she was not altogether, at starting, anybody at all—in fact she was nobody."

"Yes," replied her son; "but, being nobody, she must have had some sort of a name. And that's what I want to arrive at. She couldn't have been quite anonymous."

"Oh, her name! Well, I don't know why that should interest you, even supposing you happen to cherish designs on Ida. But, to be candid, I have forgotten her name, though I certainly must have heard it. Her husband, you know, insisted on her dropping her low relations."

"Were they low?"

"Why, of course, Robert," addressing the baronet, who was buried deep in the "Morning Post"—"Robert, what was Mrs. Frankalmoign's maiden name?"

"Er—ah, I er—ah—ought to know—Bumble? No, that wasn't

it. Trouble? No; not quite that. But an odd out-of-the-way name of that sort."

"It wasn't Hubble?" gasped Errol, almost shivering.

"Hubble? Yes, yes. Er—ah. That was the name, Errol. But why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing, father!"

"I fancy," slyly insinuated Lady Marmyon, "that Errol has revived his *penchant* for Ida. Eh, Errol?"

"Well, really, mother, I don't know. Perhaps I have. Perhaps I haven't. Ida is very pretty, and has got beyond the bread-and-butter stage now; indeed, in respect of style, you couldn't wish for anything better. But—"

"And what is the 'but,' my dear boy?" inquired the baronet, whose ears were suddenly all attention.

"Well," laughed Errol, "the 'but' represents informally the traditional slip 'twixt cup and lip. I may admire Ida Frankalmoign, yet it doesn't follow that the girl cares a rush about me. *Varium et mutabile semper fœmina*, which I will translate for my mother's benefit as 'ladies is fickle.'"

"You don't mean to tell me," drawled my lady, "that Ida would refuse you? Refuse, I mean, your chances?"

"No," replied Errol, "I don't. But, my dear mother, knowing the geography as I do, of that mysterious—not to say idyllic—region, I am equally doubtful as to whether she would accept me."

"But—er ah," snapped Sir Robert, "she must do either one or the other. There is no middle course."

"Well, father," rejoined that hopeful scion of aristocracy, "I am inclined to offer you long odds. You are, of course, a man of the world, with large and varied experience. I am barely out of leading-strings, *imberbis juvenis* and all that sort of thing. But if you were a betting man, I'd wager you a hundred to one in hundreds that Ida Frankalmoign will not refuse me and will not accept me."

"Preposterous nonsense!" grunted Sir Robert, with a snort of indignation to his "Morning Post."

"And, Errol," added my lady, in her most musical of tones, "remember that—'faint heart never won fair lady.'"

"It's not a question of heart, or of fairness either, for the matter of that, mother," rejoined the young gentleman.

Which deliverance being hopelessly enigmatical, he enjoyed the luxury of the last word.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE OPTATIVE MOOD.

It may seem surprising that the man who for nearly a quarter of a century was regarded as heir-apparent to the Marmyon baronetcy and Marmyon acreage should have dropped so completely into obscurity. This result was partly, though not entirely, to be attributed to the disposition and temper of the man himself, yet not altogether. Plantagenet, after the first burst of bitter disappointment, which caused him to long for an absolute but not very agreeable effacement, a disappointment which wounded the sentiment of self-esteem

largely developed in his composition, owing to the toadyism which had followed him from his cradle, would in his secret soul have not unwillingly closed with the baronet's offer to make him his adopted son. But there were two barriers which intervened. First, Lady Marmyon, who regarded him with aversion; secondly, Errol, who hated him. The mother and son rendered his acceptance of Sir Robert's magnanimous offer out of the question, and condemned him to play the ungracious part of the churl.

Hence the spirit aroused in this big, generous fellow's bosom by their unhandsome and unmerited hostility was not altogether unlike that of revenge. He felt that his life-long intimacy with his quasi-mother and quasi-brother had borne nothing more profitable than Dead Sea fruit, and he registered a secret resolve that he would square with both to the utmost of his ability sooner or later.

It was this feeling of injury that induced him to take steps, without Sir Robert's knowledge or assent, to secure for the true heir, whom he had supplanted, the certainty of his rights. By his instructions an eminent firm of Parliamentary solicitors commenced the preparation of a private bill on his petition for the establishment of Robert Marmyon's claim, and the business had already advanced so far that it would have been necessary to communicate with Sir Robert Marmyon, and to secure his co-operation, when the newspapers announced the death of the said heir with full details of the conflagration of the Yatkuma store, in order to verify the announcement.

Plantagenet in his lonely lodgings at Brixton sat down and pondered. He knew Horace St. Vincent. He knew Captain Dolopy. He did not know Judge Potterer, but was able to form a shrewd guess as to the man's character. Putting, therefore, two and two together, he perceived at once that there was an antecedent probability of foul play. He saw at a glance that Robert had been sent off to one of the rowdiest corners of the globe in the company of a brace of the most unscrupulous of adventurers, and he formed his own conclusions, the sole qualification thereunto being the utter impossibility of Sir Robert being constitued a party to any act of dishonor, not to say crime. If Robert from a brief acquaintance had acquired an implicit belief in the baronet, Plantagenet, who knew the man's virtues as well as his foibles and pettinesses, could not bring himself to imagine evil of one whom he both loved and respected. Yet there was the stern logic of fact staring him in the face, and he accepted it with this proviso, evolved from that portion of his inner consciousness, yclept common-sense, that Errol had somehow manipulated and pulled the wires, leading up to this fatal and cruel result.

He was chewing the cud of extreme bitterness at the bare thought of Errol—Errol, his enemy; Errol, the man who had loaded him with insult; Errol, who had stood originally between him and the girl he loved—inheriting all that he once imagined would be his, when, as it happened, he received an unexpected call from an unwelcome visitor.

He had been, as has been said, musing over his pipe after breakfast, when the loathsome Abigail—*sans ceremonie*—ushered in a biggish man with a cavernous mouth—very wide open indeed.

"Sir," said the mouth, "you may remember me. We have met twice before along the road of life. On the first occasion our interview on the green of Marmyon village resulted in a shindy, and you, I regret to observe, still suffer from the results. On the next occasion we met on rather unpleasant terms in the Marmyon Arms. To-day, sir, I intrude upon you, but not in the guise of a foe. My name, sir, is Hercules Flaymar, and I have the honor to be the president of the Central Democratic Leverage Union."

"I remember you," replied Plantagenet, bluntly. "Well, what do you want with me?"

"In the first instance, sir, if you will permit me, I should be glad to take a seat. Thank you"—in response to Plantagenet's indication of a chair. "Next, I come to consult you on a matter of business. Yes, sir, business, very much business."

"Drive on, my good chap."

"My business must develop itself by degrees. You may have seen in the papers the account of the tragic end of a young man well known to me; a young man in whose welfare I and my associates of the Union took the warmest interest. I allude, sir, to the party as jockeyed you out of your rightful inheritance, the late Robert Hodge."

"What!" ejaculaed Plantagenet, springing to his feet like one who has received an electric shock.

"You are surprised, sir. You have, however, to hear yet more that will astonish, and perhaps disgust you. I shall not hesitate in this matter to do my duty, be the consequences what they may, and I shall look to you for some sort of recognition. I mean, of course, in a practical form. I am conversing, sir, I am fully aware, with a gentleman of a chivalrous, noble, and honorable spirit, and I have every confidence that any service I may be able to render will be—"

"Oh, of course, I see what you mean. If you can aid me, in any way, I must pay. That goes without the saying; so, if you please, proceed."

"I take you at your word," muttered Hercules Flaymar, in his normal theatrical style. "Therefore, sir, forthwith, without further preface, I will now state in plain language the plain fact that brings me here to-day. You, Mr. Plantagenet Marmyon, are Sir Robert Marmyon's eldest son and heir. I repeat, sir, you are the heir, and Robert Hodge was the impostor. You smile incredulously. Defer your smiles, Mr. Plantagenet, till you have heard my evidence, or rather the evidence I am able to adduce."

"I am listening."

"That poor fellow, now no more, Robert Hodge, was not the author of the conspiracy to defraud you of your inheritance. It was not much in his nature to conspire. But his mother, that fat old woman at the Marmyon Arms, since deceased, concocted the entire plan, with the aid of certain local witnesses, and it was fathered by one who was never your very warm friend, being himself anxious to stand in your shoes, your brother Errol. That you will say is all assertion. Stop though, don't be hasty. It may be assertion, but the whole truth was evolved from the lips of Robert Hodge himself. He it was who confided it to myself, and the solicitor of the Union, Mr. Ferretman, under an oath of secrecy. Of course, if he had lived,

if he had not been, as I suspect, led into the fatal trap by the machinations of Mr. Errol Marmyon, who, having ousted you, was not going to allow another to stand in his light, then my lips must have remained sealed. The death of Robert Hodge relieves me of a load on my conscience. It enables me to come and offer you the assistance of myself, and my good friend Ferretman, to obtain your own. Sir, the whole story of Martha Hodge about your being a supposititious child was a base and transparent fabrication. It imposed on you and on your father, but on no one else. It could not deceive your mother, Lady Marmyon—albeit her preference for your brother caused her to join forces with the low, ignorant perjurers who sought to dispossess you. Had you nailed your colors to the mast and remained firm, nobody could have touched you. Martha Hodge, under cross-examination, must have broken down. Your precipitation, therefore, was most unwise. As Robert said in my hearing to Ferretman, 'To think of a man of his sort chucking up the sponge without striking a blow!' But, sir, now you have an inkling of the trick you have been served, in justice to yourself, I may say, in justice to deluded Sir Robert Marmyon, you ought to assert your incontestable rights."

Plantagenet took up his pipe, lighted it slowly, and began to smoke—and think. At last he muttered, *sotto voce*, "Your contention rests on the basis that Martha Hodge was a willful deceiver, and that she did not regard me as her son?"

"Not on that, sir, altogether. Rather on Robert's confession that his mother involved him in this plot."

"Quite so. But the gist of the whole business turns on the truth or falsehood of Martha Hodge. Now, Mr. Flaymar, suppose I meet you flat with an assertion that I have reason for believing implicitly in the honesty of that same woman?"

"You cannot get over Robert's own words!"

"Nor Martha Hodge's own acts. Are you aware that just before her death that poor woman, from sheer motives of affection, offered me a large sum?"

"Impossible. She hadn't it to offer. She died poor and in debt—at least, I beg your pardon, unless I am to infer that you accepted her offer."

"Of course I did not. You, I see, anticipated that. But she had money—a round sum. What became of it?"

"She had a pot of money!" echoed Flaymar, in a whisper of intense astonishment, "and she died suddenly, or was found dead by the roadside, and—by Heaven, I see it all!"

"What do you see, Mr. Flaymar?"

"Something I'd rather not have seen, sir. But, no matter. You cannot account for Martha Hodge pressing her money upon you, except on the supposition that you were her son? You will pardon my saying, as a man of the world, that I should adopt the contrary conclusion."

"How so?"

"Simply this. Martha did you as great a wrong as any human being could do another, short of murder. She robbed you of your parents, your title, your estate. She effected this by a tissue of lies. Can you wonder that when she saw you debased, and ruined by her

deceit, that she should have been pricked by conscience? Can you wonder that she tried, having done the mischief, to make what atonement lay in her power? Faugh, sir! The motive of the woman's offer is as plain as a pikestaff."

"Her manner," faltered Plantagenet, "pointed the other way. She was not actress enough to feign parental sentiment—at least, I fancy not."

"You'd better avoid giving the verdict, the second time, against yourself," said Flaymar, with an air of strong conviction. "You'd be a wiser man if you'd read the notes Ferretman made of his conversation, conducted in my presence, with Robert. Above all, let me emphasize the final revelation I have to make, which is this: Robert stated, sir, to us two as witnesses, not only what, in brief, I have now advised you of, but further, he requested us, in the event of anything happening to him, to make use of his declaration for your benefit, and to prevent Errol from inheriting in your stead. Now, sir, that is all."

And Mr. Hercules Flaymar, having mouthed his speech to his satisfaction, rose with much dignity of manner to depart.

"I'll think over what you say," answered Plantagenet. "But I don't admit it. Mind that. I tell you this, Mr. Flaymar, that there is only one man who could convince me of the accuracy of your statement, and he is not likely to speak."

"You don't mean Sir Robert, surely?"

"Decidedly not. I mean Robert—be he Marmyon, or be he Hodge. If he could corroborate you, I would fight for my rights like a tiger. Good-day to you, sir."

"I will leave my name and address," remarked the portentous President of the Central Democratic Leverage Union, rather chagrined at this termination to their interview. "And if you will allow me also, I will"—fumbling in his pocket—"also leave the copy of Ferretman's deposition. You can peruse it at your leisure, and should you require any further information he and I are equally at you service."

"As you like, sir. Yes, you may as well leave me Mr. Ferretman's document. Thanks."

"And, sir," added Hercules, with his hand on the door, "you'll bear this in mind, that if you utilize and profit by the information we afford, we shall expect to be compensated on a very liberal scale, a very liberal scale indeed, sir. Is that understood between us?"

"That proviso, Mr. Flaymar," replied Plantagenet, coldly, "is just what throws cold water on the whole story. However, for the present, enough."

And he turned his back on the gentleman with the cavernous mouth, who accordingly perforce retired with a certain sense of ignominy.

Then Plantagenet returned to his bird's-eye and his thoughts, neither did he condescend so much as to notice Mr. Ferretman's voluminous depositions, which remained on the table for the subsequent inspection of the loathsome Abigail and the artful landlady of these seedy apartments. His conviction remained that the lawyer, no less than Flaymar himself, lied, and lied for a purpose.

Nevertheless, the memory of this interview haunted him. It was

a bitter thought that after all Errol would be the king in Marmyon. He could have endured to witness the uncultured yet honest sovereignty of Robert, erst Hodge, and in most respects to the end of the chapter more Hodge than Marmyon. But Errol represented to his mind the *reductio ad absurdum* of the hereditary principle. He regarded the man as an unmitigated scoundrel, for whom hanging itself was too good; and he would with joy and gladness have contested his claim could he but have persuaded himself that his own counter claim was valid. Such persuasion, however, was beyond the powers of a Flaymar or a Ferretman—indeed, he could have sworn on the Gospels that Martha Hodge was no perjurer, but to the last, after her revelation had once been made, a true woman.

His mood, however, was, as will hereafter appear, to a certain extent, the parent of his future action. Morning, noon, and night the thought haunted him, "Can it be that after all I am the rightful heir?" He scorned the thought, he scoffed at it, he ridiculed it, he reviled it as a base deception. He philosophized about it, and mentally bade sleeping dogs lie, and pleaded the fatuity of cherishing silly illusions. But, for all his worldly wisdom, and all his philosophy, and all his vigorous manly sense, he could not shake it off. It awoke with the dawn. It followed him as he walked abroad. It presented itself in the night-watches. It caused him to curse Flaymar, and to wish with all his soul that Robert would come to life again, and himself depose to the truth, whatever the truth might be.

One morning he was leaving his door, when a well-dressed individual came up to him, raised his hat and said, "Have I the honor to address Mr. Plantagenet Hodge?"

Plantagenet looked at him. He seemed to be a gentleman and spoke like one, bar this, that his accent was nasal, and he emphasized the ultimate syllable in a strange way.

"The same, sir," he replied, carelessly.

"Well, Mr. Plantagenet Hodge. Then, sir, I have the honor to inform you that I am a partner in the firm of Mackestrey, of New York. I am, sir, their London agent, and I have been advised from the other side to discover, if possible, the gentleman bearing the name you give, sir, who was once the reputed son of a baronet in Kent. If I am correct in surmising that you answer to that description, I am charged to convey to you the message I have received from Messrs. Mackestrey."

"I have already said that it is," answered Plantagenet.

"Just so, sir. Then I am desired to forward a request from a clergyman in New York City, bearing the name of L'Isle, who banks with us, that you will favor him by crossing to the other side forthwith. He has empowered our firm to pay your passage, and he desires us to state that your presence is of vital importance in the interests of justice."

Plantagenet almost turned pale. This was enigmatical and obscure, but it harmonized with his strange presentiments. Besides which, if the clergyman named was Father L'Isle of his past recollections, the man whom he knew by hearsay as the Evangelist of Marmyon village, he felt assured there could be no deceit.

"Is it in your power to be more explicit?' he asked.

"It is not, sir. We are in this instance simply agents, not confi-

dants. You can have your passage free through us, if you are willing to accept it."

"I am not willing," replied Plantagenet. "Certainly not. But I shall go for all that—at my own cost."

CHAPTER XLIII.

ERROL'S ILLUSION

THE large check signed in favor of Mrs. Frankalmoign, though in reality less than £25,000—Mr. Hubble, as he would have put it, "standing in" for his share of the plunder—enabled that gay widow to cut a dash during the season, and her daughter to sip all the honey of civilized existence.

The world, not being behind the scenes, imagined the elder lady was rolling in riches, the junior an heiress, and it paid court to both with its normal servility. Society idolizes rank much, but money far more, unless the latter elects to be too self-asserting or ostentations—in which case it is apt to jib rather nastily. Ida might have made her many conquests, but she elected to be difficile to others besides Errol. Titles and shekels followed in her train, as well as impecunious soldiers, and gentry who relied on nothing more substantial than a glib tongue plus unmitigated impudence, but one and all were kept at bay. The girl had given her heart to Horace St. Vincent, and with feminine pertinacity kept it from him.

This line of hers was not quite in accordance with her mother's wishes. Mrs. Frankalmoign quite approved of the policy of keeping Errol in play, for she could not at once make up her mind to appear in the guise of a defaulter, a contingency which would necessarily synchronize with Ida's union with that young gentleman. But in her heart she really hoped that the marriage would ultimately come off, trusting to Errol's good-nature to cancel the debt. It was, therefore, with some displeasure that she noted toward the middle of the season a decided predisposition on the part of Miss Ida to snub her devoted admirer, so much so that at last she ventured to take her to task.

"You are playing, my dear," she remarked, "a positively insane *rôle*. Supposing Errol in a huff were to demand 'Yes' or 'No' from you, it would be virtually impossible under the circumstances to avoid giving a categorical answer one way or the other."

"Then what do you wish me to do, mother?"

"Do what you like, Ida, only don't drive the man to desperation. Of course, if you would be guided by me, you would think twice before throwing over so eligible a *parti*. Errol is charming in manner, clever, the heir of an ancient name—in a word, a catch. Moreover, it is not twelve months since you elected, behind my back, to get up an affair with this identical man, who at the time was much the reverse of eligible. But really"—with a profound sigh—"girls are so perverse!"

"Upon my honor, mother," rejoined Miss Ida, her fine eyes flashing angrily, "that is a trifle too cool. You have somehow spent my money, and now you want to sacrifice me in order to put things straight."

"I have not said that, Ida. You can be very severe when it suits you, but it is simply unfair to infer from a single word of advice that I am putting the least pressure on your inclinations. Pray marry whom you please."

"I most decidedly shall," observed Miss Ida, resolutely, "and the less I am interfered with the better."

"If you are in that temper," replied Mrs. Frankalmoign, "I am afraid I must go abroad. I can't afford a rupture with Errol Marmyon, and you know it."

"What! Go abroad in the height of the season! Why, mother, you would make yourself a laughing-stock!"

"A *rôle* I should prefer to that of bankruptcy."

"Errol, mother, surely would never bring matters to that pass. You are the friend of his mother, and after all a gentleman can hardly sue a lady, can he?"

"Most positively he can, and would do so if he happened to be rejected by that lady's daughter."

"And so I am to deceive this poor fellow, for whom I don't care a button, whom indeed I rather think I dislike? That is rather rough on me. I abhor humbug."

"So do I, my little dear. But in this world it is only the very rich who can enjoy the luxury of being straightforward."

And there the little *tête-à tête* duel ended, and Errol was charmed at Lady Skrumpleby's ball that same evening to find himself almost courted by the fair Ida. They say that woman is mutable; possibly there may be some truth in the allegation; but most assuredly woman in love is immutable. Errol really wished for Ida. He believed that she was the very wife adapted to his temper and inclinations. He was fascinated by her beauty, and not a little attracted both by her cleverness and the *spirituel* quality in her, a gift which men value none the less because they are themselves conscious of being deficient in it. He was perhaps too deeply interested in the pleasures of the town to follow his suit with extreme urgency, nevertheless it was his intention to win if he could; and Mrs. Frankalmoign had prepared him for a little variableness on the part of Miss Ida, so he accepted that young lady's moods philosophically.

There exists, however, a limit to human patience, and this was reached when, two days only after the ball whereat she had been so kind, Errol called. He found Mrs. Frankalmoign agitated, and Miss Ida with a flushed face. Something evidently had happened behind the scenes; something of a disagreeable character. He would willingly have deferred his visit to a more convenient and composed season, but unluckily having no excuse ready to hand for levanting hurriedly, perforce essayed to play Romeo to Ida's Juliet.

Juliet, however, was awkward, not to say perverse.

"A very pleasant affair that of Lady Skrumpleby's," he remarked, by way of ice-breaking.

"Did you think so?" replied Miss Ida. "I was considerably bored—very considerably," with emphasis.

Inasmuch as Errol had been her most devoted swain during a large portion of the evening, this speech did not sound quite of the

nature of a broad compliment. "I fancied," he rejoined, with an effort to smile, "that you were disposed to enjoy yourself."

No response.

"I am afraid," interfered Mrs. Frankalmoign, with the notion of throwing oil on the troubled waters, "that Ida is a little—ahem!—overtired to-day. Really the season does entail such exertion on girls, the marvel to me is how they get through it without fairly breaking down."

"I'm very sorry," muttered Errol, trying to appear sympathetic.

"There is nothing the matter with me," remarked Miss Ida, demurely. "Nothing. Surely, mother, one is not necessarily ill because one is bored, otherwise one's health would depend entirely on the accident of the people one chanced to meet."

"And," suggested Errol, who could not remain perfectly deaf to these broad hints, "the people you met at Lady Skrumpleby's were the wrong sort?"

"I did not say that," answered Miss Ida. "One may have missed at least one face, don't you know, without throwing any reflection on the rest of the company present?"

Mrs. Frankalmoign's lip quivered. This was very pointed.

"Quite so!" ejaculated Errol. "And who may the missing link have been?"

"Thank you. I am not personally addicted to gorillas."

"Well," carelessly remarked Errol. "I'm sorry you were bored. It must be boring to have too much of one partner.

"Did you find it so?"

"Certainly not. But I had no idea I was making a nuisance of myself to my fellow-creatures."

"Pray, don't put words into my mouth! I never suggested anything of the sort. I simply wished to infer that the affair might have been jollier if there had been another element present. That is all. It was, of course, very much like other balls. They are supposed to be exceedingly charming, but one doesn't get much satisfaction out of them."

"Unless a certain element happens to be *en evidence?*"

"Quite so, Mr. Marmyon. You interpret my ideas to a nicety." And Miss Ida followed up this pretty speech by a pretty little sarcastic laugh.

That was just as much as Errol Marmyon could stand. But he was by far too true a social artist, and too acute a diplomatist, to exhibit the slightest chagrin. On the contrary, after addressing a few civil, commonplace words to Mrs. Frankalmoign, he bowed himself out to the accompaniment of a charming smile and a steady diminuendo of colorless chatter.

But, to be candid, he was in something akin to a towering passion, and as he drove to the Panurge Club, his friends on the pavement inquired of one another what could have gone wrong with Errol Marmyon. His lips were almost livid, and there arose something like a film before his eyes. The man was disillusioned.

At the club door he paid off his hansom, and was about to enter, when a hand slapped his shoulder familiarly from behind, and a merry laugh rang in his ear.

"Why, Errol, old man, what possesses you to cut me dead? I

signaled to you with my 'brolly,' and you wouldn't—positively wouldn't see! Well, how are you? And how do you like being the coming man?"

"Thanks, Hoddy, so, so. And when, may I ask, did you reappear on this festive scene from the wilds of California?" with a flush of not quite pleasurable surprise.

"Let me think," laughed Horace St. Vincent. "It wasn't yesterday. It was the night before, just in time to miss Mother Skrumpleby's hop. You were there, I hear."

"Well, yes. Who told you that?"

"A small bird—of plumage. Can't you guess? Why, Ida Frankalmoign, of course!"

Errol looked him steadily in the face, and it suddenly occurred to his perceptive intelligence that, after all, Master Horace was very good-looking—but he dismissed the thought.

There was so much to be talked about that, hipped though he was at the moment, there seemed no alternative but to invite Horace to dinner, and the ferret on being requested by the rabbit to suck its ichor seldom declines. So it came to pass that this *par nobile* once again sat down to such fare as the Panurge *chef* affords, and it is not supposed generally to be very inferior.

They chatted long and earnestly about Robert, and Horace boldly gave it as his opinion that there could be no reasonable doubt now of his having fallen a victim to Benito's vendetta; indeed he gave himself undue credit for having manipulated the situation, and drew very largely on his imagination to prove to Errol's satisfaction that he was indebted wholly and entirely to him for the privilege of heirship.

"Nothing," he remarked, gloriously, "could have been more skillfully managed. The wretched plowman dug his own pit for himself, and dropped into it. I had simply to stand by and watch the isssue, giving the fellow a little push forward occasionally, and trusting to the chapter of accidents ending satisfactorily. But, my boy, if I had not marched the man off to the very most anarchic and demoniacal quarter of the most rowdy of the American States, there might have occurred a difficulty. Murder, of course, is simply out of the question. It is ungentlemanly, and in its results too uncomfortable to be thought of. Accidents, such as railway smashes, the capsizing of boats, or cholera, one can not exactly arrange for in advance without risking the chance of the biter being bit, and that is not good enough. On the whole, you may therefore thank your stars that you have been favored by Fortune."

"Well, yes," observed Errol, dryly, for he rather thought that Horace was in quite too desperate a hurry to jump at conclusions. "But it would be premature, wouldn't it, to assume that the animal may not regurgitate? The lawyers assure me that—"

"Phew! Errol, of course they do. But come, my boy, that won't wash. Whatever the lawyers say, you are the only heir possible now—at all events the sole heir on the tapis, so there ought to be no difficulty in arranging a moderate plunge. I have had a tip from my legal factotum to the effect that my creditors have accepted the half-crown in the pound which Sir Robert's lawyers offered them. Ergo, that's all fair and square so far. But I want money.

I want, if I may say so, a pile of money, for there are lots of people to be settled with in this business—Dolopy, Potterer, Benito, and an Irishman, whose name I forget, if he happens to be alive."

"Yes?" observed Errol, indifferently.

"You need not treat the matter quite so coolly," observed Horace, "because, don't you know, to a certain extent, all these men are in the secret. They knew that Robert had to be disposed of, and they helped me to bring the business to a crisis—but on terms—on terms. mind you, Errol. Now, if I break faith with them they will tell the tale to the whole world; and my anxiety to prove the death, yours, also, and Sir Robert's, will afford corroborative evidence of its truth. Would that quite suit your little book, my friend?"

Errol smiled. "You are slightly precipitate, Hoddy," he rejoined. "I have not repudiated; all I said was that before I can be in a position to part to the full extent of my promise I must have proof. But perhaps I may be able to do something for you now, though not, I rather imagine, in the way you expect."

"As how?"

"That depends. Suppose I say I will tell you the day after to-morrow? Will that be soon enough?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then luncheon here at two sharp, please. I expect by that time to be in a position to be explicit."

The conversation then turned to other topics, but Errol was as dull and preoccupied as Horace was animated and vivacious. Not even the Panurge pegs after coffee could impart a smile to the former's visage. The heir at that moment looked quite as melancholy and miserable as though he had been disinherited.

Needless to add, this mood of Errol was anything but gratifying to his *vis-à-vis*, who, after a dozen vain attempts to render the evening agreeable, at last gave it up as a bad job, and pleading an engagement to play whist took his departure early.

This was really what Errol wished for. The society of his fellow-creatures, and particularly of Horace St. Vincent, with his merry rattle, was for the nonce most odious to him, for his bosom swelled with a sense of being cajoled, swindled, and betrayed.

Scarcely had Errol left the room when he seized pen and paper, and dashed off the following epistle:

"DEAR MISS FRANKALMOIGN,—You are probably aware that your mother has borrowed twenty-five thousand pounds of my money on somewhat peculiar conditions. She has arranged that in the event of your accepting me as your suitor, or rejecting me positively, the money is to be returned. I am sure that you do not desire to afford her an excuse for retaining this large sum indefinitely, and as, after our interview of to-day, it is simply ridiculous to suppose that you could ever think of me—may I trouble you so far as to say so in writing?

"Faithfully yours,

"ERROL MARMYON."

CHAPTER XLIV.

A DOUBLE REVELATION.

HORACE turned up to luncheon at the Panturge with the punctuality engendered by curiosity plus expectation. He came smiling into the room, and was surprised to find Errol if possible a degree more *distrait* and irresponsive than on the previous occasion. However, he had not to wait for the *éclaircissement* he anticipated, for Errol's first words were, "I've ordered lunch. Suppose we settle our business first and eat afterward?"

No objection being offered to this rational proposition they adjourned to a small private room on the *entresol*, specially available for *tête-à-tête* interviews, and having anchored, Errol opened the ball promptly. "You want money, Horace? Good. Before I tell you how I propose to endeavor to meet this want, I must take you into my confidence. May I trust you?"

"Most certainly. *Audi, vide, tace* is my motto."

"Yes. Then here goes. Before you went to America—I think it was actually the night before you started for Liverpool—I told you that one reason why I desired to inherit the family honors was, because I entertained hopes of Ida Frankalmoign. Enough for my present purpose if I tell you in so many words, that we were engaged, that her artful old mother played Marplot, and that I imagined after the obstacle, viz., my impecuniosity, was removed, that all difficulties would cease. Mrs. Frankalmoign must have entertained the same idea, for she positively backed my bond for fifty thou., merely stipulating that I should lodge half with her bankers, to be refunded either if Ida should refuse me, or if she married me. I may tell you that this arrangement did not quite suit. I wanted the money badly for other purposes. But I could not get it except by falling in with the idea, for the simple reason that, so long as Robert may be living, even the Jews seem chary of lending on my reversion. Now to reveal the painful part of my story. I have paid Ida every attention. I have endured not a little of the feminine barometer with its chronic variations, but at last the young lady's intentions could not be misunderstood. Whoever she cares for, I'm not the man. Ergo, my dear Horace, I wrote her a letter requesting her to give me a categorical refusal in order that I might claim my money. She has not replied."

"What!" exclaimed Horace, his fine eye dilating and his face flushing, "do you mean to say she's refused to say 'Yes' or 'No'? Impossible!"

"That is the case," replied Errol.

"What does it all mean?"

"I can't quite say. I've my own opinion. However, not to beat about the bush unnecessarily, I'll tell you, Hoddy, how you are to come into this business, that's to say, if the notion meets your approval."

"Drive on, old man. I'm yours obediently."

"You are on terms with Madam Frankalmoign. You would not

be a *persona grata* in her *ménage* if you had been so foolhardy as to pay court to Miss Ida, for the worldly old woman hasn't a *penchant* for any but eldest sons, and would kick you into the street if you lifted your eyes too loftily. Anyhow, you're in her good books, I believe. Now, though Ida is playing me a false game, I own to a sort of sneaking affection for the girl—one can't help one's self in affairs of this sort, don't you know? Consequently, though I think she's behaved badly, I don't feel ambitious of any disagreeables. Let me, therefore, put this proposition before you: if you can induce this good woman Frankalmoign to hand over my money, by George! Hoddy, I'll—I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll go halves!"

Errol was excited, or perhaps he would have noted after this that Horace turned aside, sneezed, coughed, and contrived to hide his face, which was, as a matter-of-fact, twitching nervously.

"Twelve thousand five hundred pounds," at length stammered Horace St. Vincent; "make it fifteen, and the bargain stands. Or, if you prefer it, I'll take Mrs. Frankalmoign's bond for the entire twenty-five thousand, and call quits."

"Out and out?" inquired Errol. "Why, I thought you had a dozen people to pay off?"

"So I have. But only *pro rata* on my gross receipts. So far as my personal interest goes at the present moment, my only care is for—the nimble ninepence."

Errol pondered a minute. Then he hesitated. Then he faltered awkwardly, "I don't care much to be mixed up in money-matters with Mrs. Frankalmoign, and of course I am anxious, Hoddy, to do the right thing by you. Suppose I give a receipt for the twenty-five thousand in favor of the lady? You can then arrange your own terms with her. How would that do?"

It was Horace's turn to ponder now. He passed his hand nervously across his forehead, fidgeted with his leg and foot, but could not find words.

A strange idea floated at the instant before his imagination. Mrs. Frankalmoign he knew to be hard up, not to say bankrupt. Ida had confessed as much. He saw at a glance through the trickery which had placed a heavy sum to her credit, and the thought struck him irresistibly, "should he try to buy Ida?"

"I will meet your wishes, Errol," he replied, at length, with great deliberation; "but if I do so, I must take your assurance that you will sue Mrs. Frankalmoign, should she refuse to part."

"I have made the offer especially to avoid any such contingency," rejoined Errol, petulantly.

"Ah, yes, of course. Well, then, I accept on your terms. Write the receipt."

Errol called for a stamp, wrote it in full, and handed it across the table.

"Now," said Horace, with consummate effrontery, "I may as well assure you, my dearest Errol, of one little fact; one, too, which may demonstrate to your exceedingly intelligent and appreciative mind the small truism that there are many things in Heaven and earth which are not dreamed of in your philosophy. You said just now that I could not, dare not, must not, cast an eye on Ida Frank-

almoign, nor she on me. Learn, then, most sapient of all the Marmyons, that I love Ida and—"

"More fool you!"

"And Ida loves me!"

"More fool she! Upon my body and soul, Hoddy, if I had suspected anything of the kind, you would not have had that receipt to play your game with. Perhaps, after all, I am indebted to your influence for my rejection. *Apropos*, I remember, now, certain remarks of Miss Ida's, anent Lady Skrumpleby's ball, which would bear that interpretation."

Horace smiled superbly. "I left my girl," he replied, "in perfect confidence that she would stick by me, and I am not deceived in her. But perhaps, my friend, you would like a little further enlightenment—always, of course, premising that what is said is tiled."

"As you like."

"Well, then, would you be surprised to hear that Mrs. Frankalmoign does not possess a *sou* in this world except, my dear friend, *your* money? She seems to have rushed you very cleverly; and by the bye, how did it all come about? Who was the gay lender?"

"I really forget," muttered Errol, savagely. "Moses, or—or—some detestable name of the Hebrew variety."

"Don't know the man. But who arranged the entire trick?"

"A lawyer, of course. But why ask?"

"A lawyer! And was his name, by any chance, Hubble?"

"Yes."

"Thanks. Well, my friend, don't let's differ over this business. I didn't steal your girl, for she had dropped you before I made her acquaintance, and that you must know as well as I do. Hence you don't owe me one on that score. Anyhow, when I was on the t'other side of the herring-pond, the coast was clear for you, and if you couldn't make your running, don't blame me. I've done you a goodish turn in metamorphosing you from a penniless younger son, who was carving live dogs in the vain hope of getting a fellowship, into an eldest son—I ought of course to say only son—and I've accepted just one-half of what we agreed was to be the substantial consideration for my services, besides taking my screw in a very peculiar form. *Ergo*, there's nothing to split about, all being fair in love and war, so let's feed, eh?"

"Certainly," replied Errol, politely. "I was forgetting my *rôle* of host. After you."

And so this *par nobile fratrum* yet once again ate together, and laughed and chaffed as though they loved each other. Then Horace took his leave, with a sort of dim impression on his mind that it would be many a long day before again he lunched with Errol Marmyon.

He drove straight to Berkeley Street. Mrs. Frankalmoign was out, so was Ida. A judicious half-crown, however, evolved the fact that they were expected home to afternoon tea, so he walked down to St. James Street, *pour tuer le temps*.

He met, as a man of his sort would, Brown, Jones, Robinson, Smith, Tompkins, Hodgkinson—*plus* several tufts and their toadies, an artist or so, and a brace of his old duns, who capped him obsequiously on the strength of the half-crown in the pound. But be-

yond a passing remark, he did not care to stop and chat with any of the crew. He had turned, in fact, and was about to retrace his steps, when there cannoned against him a fat and not unfamiliar figure.

"Dolopy, by the powers!"

"Horace, old man, what a mysterious dispensation that we should meet. Since I preceded you to this charming country, leaving you to follow up the scent of that peculiar customer, Robert Marmyon, I have been longing for your appearance. Shall I tell you the precise reason why? I'm a man of business, you know, and keep to the point."

"Want me to be a director, or something?"

"Not that. Try again. Well, if you must know, I'm anxious you should tap Errol Marmyon, sharp."

"Why sharp, my boy? Why not give him rope?"

"Because I'm not an idiot. Because I've got the best reason for pushing the business to a crisis."

"Want money?" laughingly inquired Horace.

"Not more than usual; not less. No. It's not the wolf quite that is pursuing me. It's—I'll tell you in confidence—it's prudence."

"I don't understand, Dolopy."

"Simply this. Errol Marmyon enjoys borrowing powers now. Don't tell me he doesn't, because I'll undertake to raise him a plum in twenty-four hours. He's *the heir*, don't you see?"

"Why, of course. But, I repeat, why this desperate hurry? Errol is not the man to be rushed."

"Indeed," remarked Dolopy, dryly, "then so much the worse for two gentlemen of my acquaintance—you and I."

"Why so?"

Dolopy would have continued the conversation, but it chanced that at that very moment he espied across the street young Lord Ellington, a scion of nobility, whose name he was desirous to utilize for a company he was forming, so he incontinently burst from Horace with a hurried, "See you to-morrow," leaving him to pursue his solitary way to Berkeley Street.

Mrs. Frankalmoign was at home, so was Ida. But they were not alone. Lady Skrumpleby and her four marriageable ones—shes, of course—had invaded the Frankalmoign territory, and were engaged in lapping the fragrant Darjeeling of the period from a service of hired "old blue."

Moreover, there was no escaping these charming people. Lady Skrumpleby had taken firm possession of Madame, and a brace of Skrumpleby girls of Miss. Horace, therefore, though he tried to get a word in edgeways, was relegated to the other two Miss Skrumplebys, who did their little utmost to engross his attention, not very successfully, though they were quite pretty girls. It was a long half-hour before these quite too attractive people rose to leave, and then Mrs. Frankalmoign assumed a fussy and perturbed manner. "Really, my dear Ida," she cried, "you will be too late. Go and dress, child, at once, not a moment to spare! I'm sure Mr. St. Vincent will excuse you, and me also, for I must be thinking about my toilet. Run away, Ida, do. Eh, what?"

"I think, mamma, it is only fair to Mr. St. Vincent to tell him of

the news we heard to-day. Have you that telegram by you? He ought to know it."

"Very well. Yes, my dear. You're quite right. I'll find the telegram if only you will be so very obliging as to—"

But she had no need to say more. Ida, with a smile to Horace, had already made her escape, and then Mrs. Frankalmoign, still preserving her bewildered and worried manner, began ferociously routing in a drawer.

"The telegram—Mr. St. Vincent—" she muttered, fragmentarily, continuing to rummage among her papers, "was—oh, here it is! no, that's another—was from New York—it came to—ahem—is that it? —to Lady Marmyon, who wired it on to me. Why, here it is. Yes. You can decipher it better than I can."

Horace took it from her rather eagerly, at the same time placing in her hand Errol Marmyon's receipt, with "Read that, Mrs. Frankalmoign. It concerns you; and don't say I am not your very good friend!"

The lady accepted it, and thus each in a trice of time perused two very important documents simultaneously. The effect must have been magical, since, as though affected by mutual inspiration, both in one breath uttered the same exclamation, "Good Heaven!"

CHAPTER XLV.

A LADY'S BATTLE.

"GOOD HEAVEN!" was Horace St. Vincent's ejaculation; and "Good Heaven!" Mrs. Frankalmoign's echo. Both were equally startled, but in a different way.

Lady Marmyon's telegram ran thus:

"*From Lady Marmyon, Marmyon, Kent, to Mrs. Frankalmoign, 178 Berkeley Street, W.*

"Just heard from a clergyman named L'Isle. Robert at New York alive but ill. Break news to Errol."

"Well," gasped Horace, "to tell the truth, I'm downright relieved. Of the two men Robert's a long way the best, and he didn't deserve to be potted."

"And I," smiled Mrs. Frankalmoign, "equally so. Much obliged for the receipt, Horace, but after this little *morceau* of intelligence it is valueless."

"Valueless, Mrs. Frankalmoign?"

"Certainly. Haven't I stood surety for Errol? Under the circumstances, of course, inasmuch as I am liable to be called upon to pay £50,000, I must protect myself. I should not dream of returning his money. Most ridiculous!"

"Upon my honor," replied Horace, "you've the very calmest hand I have ever yet dealt to. But, my lady, you may be wrong. A bond's a bond, and can be sued upon. Suppose it were to fall into the hand of a third party?"

"Suppose fiddlestick's end!" remarked Mrs. Frankalmoign.

Horace was posed.

"I think," he remarked, "that this situation reads very much like 'Two for you and one for me!'"

"Why so?"

"That I should fancy amounts to an open secret which might be read between the lines without the aid of an interpreter. However, it's only fair to inform you that this same receipt," she had returned it to him, "either covers a settlement or the reverse. You are the best judge whether the accident of Errol ceasing to be heir justifies your evasion of repayment. I think not."

Mrs. Frankalmoign winced just a little at that ugly word evasion, and bit her lip. "Well," she said, "and I am to understand that you, as the holder of the receipt, are a sort of plenipotentiary to arrange terms? Good. Then, Mr. Horace St. Vincent, state your terms—please."

"Am I to state them in a word?"

"In a word."

Horace paused. At last, however, he jerked forth, with emotion, "Ida!"

"You don't surely mean Ida for Errol, the younger son?"

"Oh, dear, no! I mean Ida for me."

"For you, Horace! Why, you haven't a pice to call your own. Absurd! You could not pay for Ida's gloves."

"But Mrs. Frankalmoign is not so poor as to be unable to settle a glove bill for her married daughter, and I should fancy out of the large haul she has so cleverly extracted from Errol Marmyon might refund some portion of her daughter's fortune. Eh, madam?"

Mrs. Frankalmoign sprung to her feet in a passion. "What!" she gasped. "What! Do you dare to insult me?"

"Be calm, my dear lady. Insolence is not business, and I am talking business, pure and simple. You had better for your own sake, for Ida's sake, for my sake, hear me out. Listen. Ida is madly in love with me. You may marry her to a royal personage, a duke, or a Rothschild, but she will pine after me, and such a union will involve but two alternatives, the divorce court or the grave. I am not talking romantic balderdash. I speak from a positive knowledge of your sex. There are two varieties of women: women who feel, and women who don't feel. You belong to the latter order, and can't understand the others. You married for money contentedly, and were happy. Your daughter is cast in a different mold, believe me; and, as you know, her temper is not to be trifled with."

"Ergo, I am to permit her to marry you?"

"My meaning to a nicety. If otherwise, sooner or later you will have to face Errol—and your own daughter. Mrs. Frankalmoign, have you ever considered seriously the nature of the penalty which awaits a fraudulent trustee?"

"Faugh! ridiculous! It suits your purpose to paint Ida as a vicious virago, but you render her scanty justice. She will never lift a finger against her mother. As for Errol, the case is different, and if you, as you put it, would only make it a matter of business, I would buy your receipt. But finally, Mr. Horace, I object to mixing up buying and selling with romance, particularly where my child is concerned."

"Before I reply," said Horace, preserving an admirable *sang-froid* which his lady antagonist strove very imperfectly to imitate—"before I reply, suffer me as a friend to obtrude a little bit of quiet advice. Your best policy, Mrs. Frankalmoign, believe me, is to sanction my union with Ida, taking Ida's receipt for the large sum that has evaporated and can never be replaced. In that event you are free of all liability, including Errol. There is money enough in hand to keep the ball rolling for several years, and with my talents and your connection, surely we could calculate on some sort of *coup*, or I might get an appointment either at home or abroad. Be wise, therefore, in time. I may be a prejudiced adviser, but if you saw the cards in my hand you would call me both honest and practical."

Mrs. Frankalmoign could not answer. There appeared a modicum of common-sense in this plea, but she entertained a rooted aversion to Horace, and already, as he sat looking fixedly in her eyes, she recognized in him a cool, unscrupulous, satirical tyrant.

"No," she muttered, after a long pause.

"Very good. I take that as final. Now for the purchase of the receipt of Errol which I hold. Perhaps you will kindly mention what you will give?"

"Oh, no. I can't be both buyer and seller. It is for you to name your price, for me to consider it."

"Ten thousand pounds?"

"Impossible. I would rather run the risk, whatever it may be, than part with such a sum."

"Five thousand?"

"No."

"Five thousand, half in cash, and half in any shares you may happen to desire to dispose of?"

"Yes."

"Then I may as well take your check in exchange for my receipt, and you can send me the shares."

"I think not. I prefer that the matter should be arranged through my solicitor, Mr. Hubble."

That was all. The appointment with the lawyer was fixed, and Horace took his leave, being accorded the tips of two fingers. Then Mrs. Frankalmoign directed that if he called again at any time she was not at home.

He had not left half an hour, when in response to an urgent message Errol arrived in a hansom at the portal of the Maison Frankalmoign.

"I suppose you have heard the news?" was the singular greeting which encountered him.

"No, Mrs. Frankalmoign, I've not," he could but reply.

"I wish you had—or rather that the task of tale-bearer had not been thrust on my shoulders. Pray sit down. You have not, I am to understand, heard a syllable in reference to—to your brother?"

Errol paled.

"Is he actually dead?" he asked. "I hope his end was not very awful, very tragical, poor fellow."

"Not exactly dead, though of course we do not know what may happen. Your mother has had a wire from New York, where he

seems to have fallen in with a clergyman named L'Isle. Perhaps you know him?"

"Then the man's living?"

"Certainly—though ill, as you may imagine, or the wire would not have come from the clergyman."

"Just like my hideous luck," moaned Errol, a tear positively rising to his eye. "I'm disappointed all round. Ida—the title—the estate! Upon my honor, prussic acid seems the probable end of it all. It's preferable to pauperism."

"That," responded the lady, "is a very masculine way of looking at things. I'm sorry Ida and you could not quite hit it off, still, after all is said and done, my dear boy, there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it. Of course in respect of your prospects that is another affair altogether. But, for your comfort, I may tell you that the telegram is so worded as to convey the impression of something like danger. Probably this person—your brother—is suffering from the results of his temerity in mixing himself up with those unfortunate Irish."

"Ugh!" groaned Errol. "No such luck! The fellow has escaped. That is plainer than a pikestaff. The silver spoon is in his mouth, cad though he be, and I am condemned to effacement! What jades these Fates are! If only they existed in the flesh, I'd—by George, I'd strangle all three!" and he tried to laugh.

"Dear me, no," smiled Mrs. Frankalmoign. "That would be to kill the geese with the golden eggs. Wait, Errol, wait; all things are possible to him who waits. If you would guarantee me a thousand years of intelligent existence, I would pledge my word to die the richest woman on this planet."

The words had barely escaped her lips when in tripped Ida, as lovely as a two hours' toilet can make a young lady of fashion.

"Mother! Not ready yet? The carriage is ordered for half-past seven. How do you do, Errol? I am sorry for your misfortune."

Mother accordingly smiled sweetly, and hurried away to her lady's-maid, leaving the young pair to coo or quarrel.

"I am, indeed, most grieved," continued Ida, with genuine sympathy, "because, Errol, although you are only a friend, still—"

"Why didn't you answer my letter?"

"I couldn't. I could not say I loved you, for I love Horace St. Vincent as I never can love another human being, and my mother did not wish me to say 'No.'"

"But you encouraged me."

"I don't know that. If moods are a barometer, you ought to have found out my mind. All I can say is that I am glad the understanding was arrived at before the telegram came, or I should be suspected of mercenary motives."

"I don't accuse you of anything of the kind," responded Errol. "I have believed in you all through—and I'm sorry for you, if you'll pardon my presumption in saying as much."

"Why should you be sorry?"

"One of two things must happen. Either you will marry Horace, and so be miserable, or you won't marry Horace, and so also be miserable. A bad lookout both ways."

Ida's face gloomed. "What a prophecy!" she whispered.

"A true one. Horace is charming, clever, versatile; but he is also fickle, false, and cruel. The very man to fascinate a girl, the very man to wreck her happiness. But, in addition to all that, he hasn't a *sou*. He cannot dig, nor beg. He owes money in America. He is in essence a gambler, and, if I may say so, his ideas are about as extensive as your own. With ten thousand a year your marriage might be a *coup;* with nothing a year it must prove a *coup manque.*"

"Thank you," smiled Ida, half satirically.

"I can talk to the point," continued Errol, "because no one, least of all you, can suspect me now of anything like an *arrière pensée.* I am to-day reduced to the level of a social cipher, and no longer in the running. But, from my soul, I wish Miss Ida Frankalmoign well; and I *hate* Horace St. Vincent!" And he rose to leave.

He had advanced as far as the door when a sudden thought flashed across his brain. Quickly he traversed the drawing-room to the spot where Ida stood, looking glorious indeed in her evening dress, with her hand on the bell-rope. She paused. So did he.

"Would you oblige me," he faltered, "by asking your mother whether she has seen Horace to-day?"

"She has."

"What was his errand? Perhaps you don't know? You don't, I perceive. Then please go to Mrs. Frankalmoign at once, and ask her if Horace has been attempting to strike a bargain on a certain receipt I gave him as a matter of confidence to take to her."

"What?"

"Oblige me by making the inquiry."

Ida hesitated, flushed, but eventually ran upstairs to her mother, and as quickly returned with a message that Mrs. Frankalmoign had covenanted to purchase that same receipt for a large sum.

"Now," cried Errol, "you have before your eyes one proof of that man's base nature. We interchanged confidences. I told him of the lamentable failure of my suit. He revealed to me his success. I asked him to be the bearer of my receipt in full for the sum I handed to your mother, but I stipulated that while he might make that receipt a leverage to advance his suit, he was not to plunder Mrs. Frankalmoign, but to hand it over to her without conditions. He has, I see, tried to make a harvest out of it. Just like the man! You don't know him, Ida."

"I know this," cried Ida, bursting into tears, "that I am very, very wretched."

Whereafter—not being equal to this species of logic—he did go.

CHAPTER XLVI.

MOSTLY RETROSPECT.

ERROL had played a bold game to checkmate Horace, and success beyond his anticipations was the result. Ida Frankalmoign had first revolted against Errol on account of his barbaric cruelty to animals, and her sensibilities received an equal shock when she learned that,

as it was put to her, the man she adored thought more of money than of her, and had actually endeavored to rob her mother. Moreover, not being aware of Mrs. Frankalmoign's ukase excluding Horace St. Vincent, she was surprised at his non-appearance which she attributed to shame at being detected in rascality.

But the lost love left a blank in her life as well as in her heart. A passion like hers for this attractive yet not very worthy object could not be quenched in a moment of time. She pined and fretted so that at last her mother invited herself and daughter for the long-promised visit to Marmyon. The family, of course, with the news of the heir being still alive, had discarded mourning of the external and unreal variety, retaining only that which was non-apparent yet real, inasmuch as they were grieved enough that Errol had been supplanted. There was, therefore, no reason why visitors should not be welcome, saving and except that the baronet and his wife were much worried and perplexed in anticipation of the proximate arrival of the son who was to them, in every sense of the word, an unwelcome stranger; for, be it remarked, good Father L'Isle had written to his friend, Mr. Orphrey, a long account of Robert's physical condition, which he described as being one bordering on prostration, and he further expressed his intention of accompanying the young man to England as soon as he was in a fit state to travel; the which epistle was duly passed on to the Court. When, therefore, Ida, pale as a lily, and her mother, robust as a dairy-maid, arrived at Marmyon Court, they found that august center of social gravity metaphorically on the tiptoe of expectation. That expectation was not altogether pleasurable, as Mrs. Frankalmoign perceived at a glance from the oppressed air of Sir Robert and the languid resignation of my lady. She, however, rather relished the notion of meeting the indisputable heir, and it occurred to her vivid imagination that it might be feasible to fling Ida at his head. Her daughter was at the moment in that sort of desperate frame of mind which induces young ladies at times to marry the man they most hate in order to spite the Fates for denying them the man they love. But, of course, much would depend upon the degree of plebeianism whereunto the said heir had descended. Ida she knew to be fastidiousness itself, and it was not on the cards that she would marry a positive boor. She was not kept long in suspense. On the second day after their arrival a telegram arrived from Father L'Isle at Liverpool, requesting Sir Robert to meet him, together with Robert the heir, in London. Sir Robert accordingly took the first train to the metropolis, and in the evening returned with what Hester Mazebrook was pleased to style "a y'ost of comp'ny."

The y'ost—Anglice host—consisted of Plantagenet, Father L'Isle, Mr. Mackestrey, the banker of New York, and Robert. Happily, the Court was large enough to accommodate a sudden invasion of tenfold the proportions of this, and Lady Marmyon, of course, at once brisked herself up to do the honors—a *rôle* for which no woman was better qualified.

The party arrived in time for the ordinary Marmyon seven o'clock repast, and, after the necessary toilet, presented themselves in the drawing-room—Robert alone pleading the privilege of an invalid, and retiring to his chamber after the first brief words of salutation.

Father L'Isle was the first to enter the room. His commanding figure, rare dignity of manner, and splendid courtesy at once captivated the great lady.

"I should have hesitated," he said, "to intrude on your hospitality, but for the very pressing request of Sir Robert. Indeed, I am unlike most of my clerical brethren, in that I have long ceased to make society my special sphere. My mission in life lies in a different direction, and the vow of holy poverty I have voluntarily taken would alone render it impossible for me to mix largely with the world. But I was glad, most glad, to accept Sir Robert's kind invitation, because I think it well that your ladyship should learn from my lips the nugget you are so fortunate as to possess in your humble yet not vulgar-minded son."

Lady Marmyon smiled, a trifle amusedly perhaps. Robert the nugget would indeed be a revelation to her. However she faltered some commonplace compliment to the good father.

"Er—ah," chimed in Sir Robert, who had just entered—"er—ah, we are indebted to you, Mr. L'Isle, for the immense interest you have taken in Robert, and for the marked, yes, the er—ah—marked improvement noticeable in the poor fellow's manner. As we have a quarter of an hour before the gong goes for dinner, I'm sure both my wife and I will be grateful if, in the fewest words, you can give us an inkling of his mysterious disappearance and er—ah—reappearance."

Father L'Isle bowed. "You are aware," he said, "of the facts concerning the blowing up of Judge Potterer's mine by a miserable gang of deluded Irish miners, whereof all, except the ringleaders, paid the penalty with their lives. Robert, poor fellow, was involved in that affair—by implication only. He was as innocent of foul play as a babe, and protested in advance against it. By one of those mysterious coincidences which the Church attributes to Providence, the world to chance, Robert, in consequence of his being under suspicion, was ordered off the mine within a few minutes of the catastrophe. The noise of the explosion warned him, as a suspect, to provide for his safety. He fled. His legs in the first instance saved him; next, the possession of money. After a run of some ten miles, as he calculates, he encountered a party of miners, and from them purchased a horse. He then rode for dear life, the horror of pursuit and consequent Nemesis being upon him, and at last, by an extraordinary circuit, he reached San Francisco, but in a condition too terrible to be talked about. He had slaked his thirst with impure water, and when I was summoned to his bedside he was raving from fever."

"Pardon me," interrupted Lady Marmyon. "But why did he not endeavor to discover Horace St. Vincent, who was his guide, and, if one may so say, his guardian? Horace must have been actually at that very moment in San Francisco."

Father L'Isle looked grave. "Mr. Horace St. Vincent, Lady Marmyon, must speak for himself," he replied. "All I can tell you is, that the poor fellow's great horror was lest this same Mr. St. Vincent or his friend, a captain, whose name I forget—"

"Dolopy," suggested Sir Robert.

"Yes, Dolopy—that is the name—lest they should find him out. He called St. Vincent Judas, and—"

"A bit of temporary mental aberration!" interposed her ladyship, rather scornfully.

"Not so. That comparison was drawn by him in his convalescent stage; and if all he tells me be—however, perhaps I had better avoid criticism and proceed with my narrative. Suffice it that, rightly or wrongly, he lived in terror of these gentlemen; and when, as soon as his brain steadied itself after the fever, I showed him the advertisements in the American papers offering rewards for the discovery of his whereabouts, he charged me, by my fidelity as a priest, to keep his secret. It was, as you may surmise, some time before I could permit him to move; and when he did travel with me northward, it was under an assumed name. At New York his resources and mine both ran short; but I happened to have gained the friendship during my previous sojourn in that city of Mr. Mackestrey, who, with a liberality I can never hope to requite, placed almost unlimited funds at our disposal. This was providential; for Robert had a relapse, and it was in consequence of that circumstance that Mr. Mackestrey at my request telegraphed for Mr. Plantagenet. The precise reason for that step I need not now mention. It will transpire, doubtless, and I think you will appreciate the promptitude wherewith that gentleman responded to the summons. That, however, is the outline of the story, except one all-important detail."

"And that?" inquired Lady Marmyon, eagerly.

"Simply this: that my intercourse with your son has resulted in his acquiring religious belief and experience. You sent him abroad to be metamorphosed from barbarism to something approximating culture. He has returned to you, as Sir Robert puts it, improved; as I shall venture to affirm, changed. How far the change has affected his mind in the direction of true culture you will perceive as you become better acquainted with him. He is certainly more in harmony with you in one respect than he was of yore. He was a socialist, and no Christian. He is a Christian, and his social theories have been largely modified. If you can surmount the natural antipathy all of gentle birth feel for a Doric dialect and a Doric demeanor, you will learn what a treasure you have in a Christian son."

"Amen!" echoed the baronet. But her ladyship merely remarked, "There is the gong. Please introduce your friend, Mr. Mackestrey. I want to talk to him about New York."

And so deglutition, for the nonce, interrupted graver topics. The party sorted themselves, and marched in couples to the chamber sacred to the mysteries of Lucullus.

Errol was absent; and hence, though Lady Marmyon was frigid, Plantagenet felt so much at home as more than once to quite forget that he was a stranger. He sat next to Ida Frankalmoign, who chatted to him agreeably, and indeed cordially, reminding him, with her sweetest smile, of his promptitude in saving her arm from the fatal teeth of the adder in Flesset Wood. And when, after dinner, the honest, impetuous baronet grasped his broad hand and said, "Planny, I could wish that you were still my son, for no man ever boasted one more noble!" the tear started to the fine fellow's eye as

he made response, "Perhaps you have a son to be proud of. I think so."

"My dear Mrs. Frankalmoign," gasped my lady, indignantly in her boudoir after they had all sought their respective chambers. "What an assortment! A wild priest—rather interesting, of course, but wild. A Yankee millionaire philanthropist, who caculated nasally, and guessed the Court was almight ancient. That beef-eating boor, poor, spurious Plantagenet—the impertinence of the wretch in making eyes at your sweet Ida! And Robert, from the plow-tail nestling upstairs under the roof as my son. What sins have I committed that I should be subjected to the horror of hobnobbing with such people?"

"I thought Sir Robert—ahem—rather in form."

"Yes; oh, yes. Quite so. Sir Robert's one of those amiable Don Quixotes who will follow what he considers to be abstract right to the bitter end of disgrace and degradation. He never half appreciated Errol and he can therefore bring himself to imagine that this creature Robert, having been transmogrified by a wandering friar from a demon into an angel, must necessarily cease to be a vulgarian and become a gentleman. It's really too stupid a supposition to discuss. For my part, although I am sincere in my devotion to Church principles, I confess that a diabolical gentleman seems vastly preferable to an angel proletarian. I could tolerate Lord Rochester, but not John Milton."

"The question is," slyly rejoined Mrs. Frankalmoign, "whether, if your son Robert with his new ideas and, as I suppose Father L'Isle would call it, his chastened temperament, were subjected for a length of time to cultured influence and none other—whether he might not be made presentable?"

Lady Marmyon sighed. "I only wish," she remarked, "that mine was not the particular cultured influence destined to experiment upon that mass of raw material."

"Yes?" laughed the other lady; "well, I confess I really should not at all mind a little trouble, provided that my pupil was apt and teachable. Besides which, as the poor fellow staggered into the hall by the aid of good Father L'Isle's arm, I really thought his illness had given him quite a refined air. As a matter-of-fact, however, it will not be his mother's, nor indeed any other influence of the ordinary sort, that will educate and elevate him. It will be that of his wife."

"And he wants to marry a washer-woman!" almost shrieked in her bitter anger this proud woman. "A washer-girl, I ought to say, who has occasionally assisted in the coarser work of our laundry. Really when one reflects what the man is, though I grant it is his misfortune and not his fault, and what his tastes and motives are, it paralyzes one—it freezes one's very marrow!"

"You don't tell me," murmured Mrs. Frankalmoign, "that the man's actually going to commit social suicide by taking for his wife, and your daughter-in-law, a wench from the wash-tub! Impossible!"

"I hope so. But if not it won't be his fault. As a matter of fact, since he went away to America, this Venus di Soapsuds has levanted, goodness knows where, or on what errand. You can understand the

kind of line a village beauty would take. I'm told the streets of London are crowded with them—impudent hussies!"

"Oh!" murmured Mrs. Frankalmoign, greatly relieved, adding, however, to that meaningful ejaculation the dry remark, "perhaps fortunate predilection that of the young woman—I mean for a different sphere, of course; because had she remained here she would have been rather a nettle for you to grasp."

"I don't know about that," replied her ladyship. "If Robert had elected to join forces with a person of her sort, of course he would have been compelled to absent himself. So far, however, all's well that ends well. We have escaped one entanglement, but what will the next be?"

"What, indeed!" echoed Mrs. Frankalmoign, thoughtfully, as she wished my lady an affectionate good-night, "what, indeed, unless some good fairy should intervene!"

"Good fairies," sneered Lady Marmyon, "don't affect porcupines, and Robert is a porcupine. He bristles with vulgarities."

CHAPTER XLVII.

PLANNY, THE PRIEST, AND THE PENITENT.

THE morning following was devoted by Sir Robert Marmyon to a series of *tête-à-tête* interviews with his guests in the library. *Imprimis* with Plantagenet, who delivered himself with oracular precision. "The reason why I was summoned to New York," he averred, "was because Robert, believing himself to be dying, desired that I should convey to your mind certain facts which bear but one interpretation. He has happily recovered, and can say his say for himself, so that I shall prefer to preserve a judicious silence. But I must own this, that this man's object in summoning me was to save you from deception. My prompt action in acknowledging his rights seems to have given him a very favorable impression of my honesty and veracity, and I need not add that he avows himself a firm believer in *your* honor. What he was anxious to avoid was your being tricked and cajoled. Were I to say more I should be anticipating his statement."

"Pardon me," asked Sir Robert, "but who was likely to cajole or trick or deceive me?"

"You had better hear Robert's own allegation."

"No. I prefer to hear you. The door is closed. What passes will never cross my lips; and surely, Planny, you need not hesitate to confide in your fa—, in me?"

"I don't know," soliloquized Plantagenet, very dubiously. "My position is peculiar, almost equivocal. If I open my mouth I may appear in an unenviable light. I repeat, sir—hear Robert."

"I wish to hear you, and you only. I beg you to speak plainly, as your friend and father from infancy. I command you, Planny."

There was no escaping this obligation. Slowly, carefully, and in guarded language, Plantagenet narrated all that had occurred, as it had been revealed to him at length by Robert and Father L'Isle. When he had told the story he added—but not as his own dictum—its corollary as deduced by Robert.

"Robert," he said, "entertains a firm conviction that St. Vincent and Dolopy were in league with Potterer, Benito, and probably Frayney, to get rid of him. That in money-matters the two principals were flagrantly dishonest can hardly be disputed. You were robbed by them. But apart from that, they seem—according to Robert's suspicions—to have had a motive in the background, and I am sorry to say that his suspicion goes further, and traces the origin of the entire conspiracy to one source—a source which I had rather not so much as name."

Sir Robert shaded his face. "Quite wise on your part, Planny, on no account to ventilate a notion which can bear no surer basis than mere suspicion. Quite wise!"

"Yes," replied the young man, "you are right; and I think it would be better if that phase of the matter were left untouched, except by Robert himself."

"No," answered Sir Robert, with unwonted firmness. "Be good enough to tell Robert on no account to accuse any one—any one, I repeat, Planny, whether he has grounds of accusation or not. I have to bear far more than he can ever appreciate. Out of regard for my feelings he must in turn forbear. You will make him understand that, Planny?"

Plantagenet bowed his acquiescence, and retired in favor of Father L'Isle.

The good priest's testimony was in every item the reiteration of what the baronet had already heard; but, as a matter of obligation, that earnest apostle would not rest content with the mundane aspect of the narrative.

"Sir Robert," he said, with tenderness in his every accent, "you will pardon my saying that there must be a strong element of Christian morality in your nature to have impelled you so thoroughly in the direction of right. Your conduct toward your son has been magnanimous. You might have repudiated him; you might have relegated him to obscurity. You acted in a different spirit—albeit in consigning the young man to evil associations, you—"

"I did not believe them to be evil," pleaded the baronet.

"Of course not. Yet, if you had adopted my standpoint, you would hardly have expected good to accrue from the tutelage of a man totally devoid of principle."

"It was an error," Sir Robert could but confess.

"Quite so. Happily, however, the result you hope to accomplish by equivocal means has been arrived at, but in another way. Has it ever occurred to your mind how very unaccountable it is, except on one hypothesis, that the Galilean fishermen should have been in after-time the authors of tractates than which there exists nothing more exquisite in the whole circle of language? You will reply, in the stereotyped phraseology of belief, that they were inspired. Certainly they were, and in a very exalted degree. But, Sir Robert, do you imagine that inspiration ended with the Apostolic age?"

Sir Robert could not reply to this query. It was over his head.

"Of course, we call inspiration by a different name now. We call it grace. Words, however, at best do but mutilate ideas. The worst pigments you can use to paint a picture are words, only they happen to form the only material we possess. I shall, therefore, in

speaking of Robert, employ the simplest language. The young man has undergone a change. He is now in every respect, except mere diction, a gentleman, but his quality is that of St. John, and not of Lord Chesterfield."

"I am very grateful to you," replied the baronet, not without some emotion in his usually crisp voice.

"No; don't thank me. Thank the Power that has effected this. Above all, if it should so happen that you, as a true gentleman, should be impressed by the fact of your son's renovation, perhaps you may deem it worth your while to seek for some such spiritual experience as has elevated the uneducated plowman out of the mire, and may exalt a man of your caliber far higher. May I hope so?"

Sir Robert bowed. He could not take offense at this pointed speech. The motive of Father L'Isle was too evidently sincere to be resented. And so, in turn, after the sort of civilities men, be they of the world or the Church, think it only right to interchange, they parted, and Robert entered his sire's sanctum.

The baronet greeted his son with every show of affection, alluding incidentally to the strong testimony in his favor he had heard from the lips of Father L'Isle. A few rapid utterances in reply, by Robert, soon demonstrated to his father the positive accuracy of what the priest had asserted. The young man was a skeleton, weak as water, and gentle as a lamb. But he had acquired one of the chief *cachets* of breeding—a quality which may be defined, paradoxically, as unconsciousness. Before, he had been painfully aware of his inferiority, and to cover it had adopted a manner of brusque independence. Now, he had bidden a long farewell to all his pride, and the outcome was a sudden development of innate courtesy. He was at his ease, and his tongue flowed naturally, consequently his errors of grammar and pronunciation were less apparent.

"I have been pondering," he said, "over my future, and have asked the advice of that great and exalted soul to whom I owe all in the present, all in the future—I mean Father L'Isle. Between us we have concocted a plan which I hope will meet with your approbation. May I state it in plain language?"

"I am most interested," observed Sir Robert.

"Before I went abroad my mental vision was limited to what Father L'Isle terms 'the good of this life.' I saw the toiling hundreds on your land. I realized, as I had shared, their hardships, and I desired to ameliorate them. My notion was to divide and to level. I have not ceased to desire to improve practically the lot of the laborer, but I have arrived at the conviction that to devote my entire life to any such humane project would be to a certain extent unsatisfactory. I appreciate now the immense value of the future as contrasted with the present; and am quite certain that I should be rendering the laborers a grander service by persuading them to acquire the true riches than by any attempt, even if it were successful, to secure them more beer to drink; for that, I fear, is very much what more wages means."

"Capital!" almost screamed Sir Robert, grasping his son by the hand. "It does my heart good to hear you speak in terms of sober

common-sense, and to think that you have discarded that vile communism. This is indeed a change for the better."

"I don't want to be misunderstood," answered Robert. "If I were in a position of responsibility, like that you now hold, I should feel it a matter of duty to take as warm an interest in the men on the estate I owned as though they were my brothers. The tenants would pay them their weekly wage, but I should provide each man with land sufficient to enable him to double his fixed earnings, and with money also to start with. I am afraid, too, that I should be tyrant enough to turn the Marmyon Arms into a club, and cut off the supply of poison at the main."

"Yes?" smiled the baronet. "Well—some day"—with a sigh—"when I am gone, you may have the chance of your Utopia. But you were speaking of yourself—of your future?"

"I have been compelled," continued the younger man, "to allude to my motives, in order to explain the nature of this plan, which I trust you may approve. In a word, I was, as it were, till yesterday, before all things humanitarian. I am now, before all things, religious. As Father L'Isle puts it, time was when I desired the greatest happiness of the greatest number in this life. Now I add to that desire the still more earnest wish for the greatest happiness of the greatest number in the next."

"A sort of spiritual Benthamism," soliloquized Sir Robert, as he motioned him to proceed.

"That being so, my mission is not the world, but the Church."

"The Church!" cried Sir Robert, amazed. "Er—ah, my dear son, I hope you mean the er—ah, Church of England. Dissent is my, er—ah—detestation, and although some of the best and oldest families of the country are Roman Catholic, I have never yet been quite able to understand how a man with a very keen sense of honor can indorse the principles of the Jesuits. But of course Roman Catholicism, if an objectionable, is decidedly a gentlemanly religion, whereas Dissent, apart from its infernal Radicalism, is very much the reverse."

Robert smiled. "I don't suppose," he replied, "if I thought a creed was true, that I should stop to inquire whether it was genteel or vulgar. However, to relieve your mind, I may as well say at once that my Church is that of Father L'Isle. The Church of England—but the new Church of England, the Church which is in the fore-front of the battle, not only in England, but in America."

"You mean, I suppose, what is termed Ritualism."

"Something of the sort, though for myself I care less for the shell, however beautiful it may be than for the kernel, for the faith rather than for the form."

"Well, my dear sir, I have known in my time one or two men, and women too, who belong to the *crême de la crême*, and yet are ardent Ritualists. Ergo, so far, so good. You will, I presume, study for the Church, and that alone will be of immense benefit to you, for your education hitherto has been, alas, nil. But, may I ask, do you contemplate abjuring marriage and that sort of thing?"

Robert sighed. "Who should I marry?" he asked, plaintively.

"I am not suggesting any one," replied the baronet. "I was

only inquiring whether Father L'Isle's particular phase of belief necessitates celibacy?"

"Marriage," answered Robert, sadly, "ought to be love. I have loved once—but, never again."

"So you seriously think of being a celibate?"

"I have not thought that; but I have no thought of any other state. It would be impossible."

The baronet pondered deeply. The more he reflected on this plan the better he liked it. It seemed to cut the knot of all difficulties, and would virtually render Errol, or Errol's son, the ultimate heir.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

LOVE'S CLIMAX.

"HAVE you ever seen Reffern Lake?" inquired Lady Marmyon of Mrs. Frankalmoign at breakfast on the morning following. "No? Well, what do you say to a sort of picnic there—*en famille*, you know—only ourselves?"

"Charming," replied that lady. "A lovely morning. You must persuade Robert to come, Planny. Poor fellow, how white he looks; and he is really so very nice."

"I think," smiled Plantagenet, "that Miss Ida's powers of persuasion exceed mine; but I will try."

This speech was rather of the nature of *mauvaise pleasantry*, but it was deserved. Ida had had a hint to cultivate Robert, and, in a sheer spirit of mischief, had followed it up so successfully as to have completely fascinated that unsophisticated young man. "I never before," she remarked sarcastically, to her mother, "in the whole course of my life have had the chance of hobnobbing with a real, live, male cad. It is an experience, at all events, and it amuses me. In society every one looks at everything from precisely the same angle, but this fellow seems to have seen everything round a corner. His ideas are really so extraordinary as to be quite refreshing."

The great lady of the house having pronounced in favor of this expedition to Reffern Lake, it came off accordingly. Father L'Isle with his friend Mr. Mackestrey, had left the Court, so the party consisted solely of Sir Robert and my lady, Mrs. Frankalmoign and Ida, Plantagenet and Robert. The drag easily accommodated them, plus the flunkies and luncheon-baskets, and Phœbus was more than propitious; indeed, that coy deity positively beamed upon their progress from Marmyon to Reffern.

As they drove in fine style through the Park gates and across the village green, Ida contrived completely to engross Robert in conversation. But for that circumstance he might have been more than startled, inasmuch as at the familiar door of Shepherd Williams's cottage stood a gentle girlish figure with a pale and troubled face, and an eye that as it fastened on Ida and perceived how apparently she held him in the palm of her hand, dilated strangely—one might say truthfully in a fashion most weirdlike and unearthly.

And yet Miss Ida's chatter was alike frivolous and harmless. The girl was simply amusing herself as girls will who have been thwarted.

"How far did you say it was to Reffern Lake?" she asked.

"Not far. About six miles. Quite an easy distance. I suppose you admire scenery, Mr. Marmyon?"

"Yes; but I've not seen much."

"Indeed? You have been in America, haven't you?"

"That I have, Miss Ida"—he called her Miss Ida much as though he were a groom—"only one doesn't quite appreciate scenery, however beautiful it may be, when you are running for dear life."

"Well, no, I should imagine not. And pray, Mr. Marmyon, when you were young did you live in this village? And which was your—ahem—residence?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Ida, the village was my home, and the public house there across the green was where I lived."

"How very odd! And when you grew up did you plow and harrow and reap and thresh and all that sort of thing—and was it interesting, don't you know?"

"I labored," replied Robert, gravely, "like any other laborer in the fields. I believe, too, I may boast, that in one purely Kentish art—that called nidgeting—I was considered the best man in the parish."

"Nidgeting? What a delicious word! Nidget. Thou nidgets. He nidgets. We nidget. Ye nidget. They nidget. I wonder what the French for 'nidget' is?"

"That's beyond me," smiled Robert, who didn't at all perceive the sour sneer underlying Ida's sweet dreamy smile. "All I know is that Farmer Rodd paid me four shillings a day for the job."

"Four shillings a day! What a nasty mean thing—the idea!" ejaculated the young lady, who really thought such a wage-rate ridiculously low—perhaps it is. "Why, Mr. Marmyon, one couldn't keep one's self in scent on such a pittance."

"Scent," observed Robert, laughing, "is not an absolute necessity of life—for laboring men. You will hardly believe me when I say that my regular wages were not four, but three shillings a day, and yet that I was fairly content to work on from week's end to week's end."

"It certainly exhibits the irony of fate in a very ridiculous light," observed Ida. "Fancy you, Mr. Marmyon, the heir of such a noble place, and the head of so ancient a house, descending to so very low a level. I wonder you can bear to think of it. It would seem to me like a hideous nightmare."

"Nothing of the kind," protested Robert. "I'm not ashamed of having earned my own dinner."

"Of course," demurely added Miss Ida, who began to think, from a slight flush on Robert's face, that she might have said just one word too much, "the special knowledge you have acquired of agriculture, and all that sort of thing, will be of immense value to you one day. I quite see the force of that."

Now, if clever Miss Ida had designed to titillate Robert's perceptions pleasurably, she could hardly have invented anything more suitable for that purpose than this dry practical utterance. It set the young man's tongue a-wagging nineteen to the dozen, until at last the drag came to halt by the shore of Reffern Lake—a big pond it would have been styled anywhere out of Kent.

Here, naturally, the party regrouped itself, and for the space inter-

vening before luncheon Ida fell to the lot of Plantagenet, and Mrs. Frankalmoign devoted herself to the gratifying taste of extolling her daughter's beauty and virtues in Robert's listening ear.

"So," said that diplomatic woman of the world, "I hear Mr. Robert, that you have devoted yourself to the Church. That is a very, very good resolve. I dote on the Church. It is a quite too charming profession, and as for Ida—she has often declared that with her idealism it would be insanity for her to marry anybody except a clergyman. A duke made her an offer—I may tell you in strict confidence—only last week, and she responded with a sigh, 'If only your grace had been a bishop!'"

"Perhaps," retorted Robert, "Miss Ida didn't relish the man himself. Some dukes are not young."

"Quite so, quite. But you are too sarcastic, Mr. Robert, for a clergyman. And pray, are you High Church, Low Church, or—ahem—any other Church?"

"I really can't answer you," replied Robert, "I don't know."

"The very echo of what my dear Ida says. She has no cut-and-dried principles, don't you know, no prejudices."

"Except," interposed Lady Marmyon, "in favor of galantine, I hope. Come, good people, luncheon!"

Luncheon at most picnics is arranged on the principle that the ladies shall eat and the gentlemen wait. The party on the present occasion being of small proportions, both sexes fared equally well—in fact, what with luxurious viands and sparkling wines, Robert seemed gayer than he had felt since his Bohemian experiences in 'Frisco.

"How very well Ida gets on with Robert," remarked one lady.

"How very well Robert gets on with Ida," echoed the other.

And so, that being a phenomenon of the obvious sort, the politeness of the company induced them to so arrange that this pair should be left to their own devices.

Reffern Lake is fed by a small rivulet which flows into it at the further end, the lake itself being leg-of-mutton shaped, and narrowing toward the extremity. About one hundred yards above the junction of the lake and stream—the proprietor of the demesne being a gentleman of taste—an ornamental bridge has been thrown across, and at that point the water is deepest. Toward this point Ida Frankalmoign, with Robert for cavalier, strolled leisurely at some distance from the others, in a pathway of greensward, overhung by the waving branches of splendid forest-trees. As they advanced, Ida noticed the figure of a girl stationed on the bridge itself at its center, and leaning over the parapet with eyes fixed on them—meaningfully.

Robert, however, half-intoxicated by the charm of the conversation, and magnetized by a flattery tenfold more attractive by being so delicate, had his eyes so riveted to Ida's really beautiful face as to be quite lost to every surrounding object. He was indeed indulging in a rather disjointed description of Californian mining for his fair partner's delectation—she, by the bye, caring as much about mining as about the differential calculus or the obscure readings of the Prometheus—when suddenly Ida gave such a start, and emitted

such a gasp of horror, as brought him down heavily from wild fancy to stern fact.

"Whatever is that girl going to do?" whispered she, at once pointing her finger and trembling. "Is she mad? Can't you stop her? Oh, Mr. Marmyon! See! see!"

See! Ida Frankalmoign had no need to utter that injunction. Robert's eyes could not deceive him. They were too close to the girl for that, and, indeed, ere Ida had hurled forth her hasty ejaculations, he had broken from her side and made headlong for the bridge.

The figure was that of a young girl—of the young girl who had watched the Marmyon drag pass Shepherd Williams's cottage, of the young girl whose faithful heart had taken her all the way to New York for his sake, and who had arrived there only to read in the papers the account of how the missing heir of Marmyon had turned up in Manhattan itself; of the young girl who had journeyed back with all speed from America in high hope, to read at a glance in the mirror of imagination the destiny of the man she loved, and to believe that after all he was not for her, but for some one whose hands had never been defiled with soapsuds, who had been nurtured delicately, and was the equal of his new and superb relatives.

It was that maddening thought that drove her to follow afoot the trail of the Marmyon thorough-breds. It was the sense of all being lost that caused her to crave for a verdict—ay, before them all he should take her to him or cast her from him.

And so she came, and stood afar off, watching. And she saw them all part right and left, so as to allow Robert, and Ida to mate. She saw him gaze into Ida's eyes, and linger on her words, and talk as she knew he could talk. And in her simple soul she set all this down to the score of love, and as the wave of despair passed over her she yielded to it helplessly, as has many a maiden ere now before Polly Williams.

She had mounted the parapet of the bridge; she had waved a farewell to Robert Marmyon; she had cast one last look at the beautiful sun, when a glance told her that *he* was already hurrying toward her. Then she would have paused, gladly, but anon her head reeled, her foot failed her, and with a shriek she fell down into twenty feet of crystal water ere ever Robert could clutch her dress.

"Save her! who will save her?" cried the agonized voice of the man—man at that moment of extremity once more—"I CAN NOT SWIM!"

CHAPTER XLIX.

SAVED.

ROBERT MARMYON'S cry of horror rose to high heaven, and it seemed for the nonce as though, infected by a sudden madness akin to hers, he was about to cast himself headlong into the waters beneath which Polly had already sunk. But at this supreme moment there was one at hand ready to save—a man of prowess, an athlete, and gifted with the cool courage which the strong alone can boast. With fine promptitude, yet with a semblance of leisureliness, Plan-

tagenet flung off his coat, plunged into the lake, and swam with ease and rapidity toward the bridge. The women on the bank held their breath. Robert sobbed for very impotence, yet it needed no herald to assure them of the certainty of the girl's safety. That iron arm which had by its own colossal force dragged the Dark Blue ship to victory at Mortlake, the arm that was the heritage of centuries, nay more, of eras, of muscular exertion, gripped as in a vise Polly's dress, then caught her firmly and upheld her head above water, and finally placed her, as it were a toy, on the greensward of Reffern Lake.

Robert was there waiting to receive her. In his arms he bore her apart, and he remembered afterward how—thanks to the magic of good breeding—they all, appreciating the situation, kept aloof, and allowed him to be the first to administer balm to the still terrified, dazed, and hysterical girl. She did not speak, though she was conscious quite, but the luster of her eye spoke volumes as Robert, in his own old, homely, Kentish tongue, poured forth once again the old, homely, Kentish words of endearment—the echoes of Flesset Wood.

At last, however, Sir Robert with diffidence came forward.

"I think—er—ah—" he said, in a low and by no means unsympathetic tone, "that—er—ah—a little brandy would be advisable. But unluckily that is the sort of fluid we do not usually carry about with us. There is sherry, however. You had better, Robert, try and get her to swallow some."

"That is very kind of you: yes, please, if they will fetch it from the carriage."

"Quite so. I will give orders at once. And I think after this—er—ah—untoward incident we shall all of us think about returning. Suppose—as we are by preference, on this lovely day, outsides on the drag—suppose we put her inside, and take her to her home, poor thing?"

Robert, with a tear in his eye, could but again express his gratitude; and then Lady Marmyon came up, and in a grand patronizing way, remarked, *sotto voce*, "She is shivering. I think there is a wrap of mine somewhere in the drag;" and next Mrs. Frankalmoign added, in a stage whisper, "What a really exquisitely beautiful face. But what does it all mean?"

"Mash—mother!" muttered Ida, with a sarcastic *moue*.

Plantagenet alone had stood aside. He was in a very unpleasant predicament, having enjoyed the luxury of a cold bath with his inexpressibles and shirt on. It would have been pleasing to his sensibilities to have divested himself of those moist and dripping garments. Not, however, enjoying the glorious freedom of the savage, this arrangement appeared just now rather less than feasible. Luckily, however, his coat was dry, and it contained cigars and matches. So he lighted up, gulped down a tumbler of fluid, and in a cheery voice protested that he never felt better.

He might well say so. For while Lady Marmyon, with matronly solicitude, was wringing the water out of Polly's clothes, a performance necessitating the temporary absence of the male sex, Robert walked up to him, clutched his hand and said, "Sir, no man was ever indebted to another more deeply than I am to you. If I were

worthy to beg the honor, I would plead to be allowed to call you brother."

"Tut, tut, my good fellow," replied Plantagenet, with an Oxonian's hatred of tall talk. "That's all right. If you could swim, you would have done as much. Lucky I chanced to be on the spot."

But that was not all. There was a spice of romance still lingering in Ida. The young lady in the days of her pupilage had been ardently addicted to hero worship, and it was only the *nil admirari*, *blasé* cynicism of society that had effaced this not ignoble sentiment. She had ceased to believe in heroism, because the heroes she met in the flesh were, in respect of the *petit maître* accomplishments so dear to feminine intuitions, vastly inferior to *gommeux* of the Horace St. Vincent type. But when *ante oculos* she saw a strong man save a human life from destruction and repudiate praise afterward with something like indignation, her soul seemed to warm toward that same exemplar of ideal manhood.

In a word, she quietly but firmly, *malgré* mamma's frowns, took the big fellow in hand, and gave him a glorious afternoon. Her most winning ways, her sweetest smiles, her liveliest chaff were all for him, and when suddenly remembering himself, he gloomed over and with gall on his tongue reminded her that he was Hodge—nothing but Hodge—she replied, prettily, "You have proved yourself Plantagenet in name and Plantagenet in nature."

And so, to the lofty surprise of the august flunkies, Polly, bewildered still and trembling, was supported by Robert to the drag, and as he took his place by her alone inside, the party drove away homeward, while less than an hour afterward the village was electrified by perceiving the drag draw up at Shepherd Williams's cottage, and deposit thereat not only poor Polly Williams, but also the heir of the vast demesne of Marmyon.

Robert could not, would not leave her. At his entreaty the local Esculapius was summoned to attend her. The shepherd improvised a shake-down bed for him by the kitchen fire, and he smoked his pipe with that humble but honest son of toil, as of yore, the sole difference between them and now being that he resolutely declined Miss Belinda's brewer's chemicals.

Little by little he heard all. How he had been willfully deceived by a tricky Irish-American into disbelieving the truest of hearts. How she had gone to London to seek him, but again had encountered something like treachery. How—at last—she had actually traveled alone, with no other ægis than beauty, simplicity, and modesty, with no guide and no friend, from that humble home, across the wide ocean to New York, and back again.

"And you won't, Robert, I do hope," pleaded Mrs. Williams, earnestly—"you won't be so 'ard-'earted as to jilt the poor thing arter all that there?"

"Jilt!" cried Robert. "Well, Mrs. Williams, you have a right to reproach me. I have been a vain and false fool, and am unworthy of such a treasure. No. If I were to jilt her, I should be deserving of the fate of Cain. There is that which is more priceless than riches, honors, all that men covet, and I tremble to think that she may consider that of such love as she has given I am not worthy."

"Perhaps you bain't," retorted Mrs. Williams. "But that ain't in Pol's mind."

Nor was it. Polly forgot, forgave, and hoped, for Robert was stanch. He offended to the verge of exasperation their mightinesses at the Court by continuing to live on in a hugger-mugger style at the honest shepherd's house. He cast prudence, if not duty, to the four winds. Finally, although he adhered to his resolve, if possible, to embrace the sacred profession, he was prepared to carry out his part of the pact by emigrating to one of the colonies, and accepting ordination at the hands of a colonial bishop; indeed he was about to announce this his determination to Sir Robert, when events occurred which turned the tide of his life in a different direction: for there are yet some threads to be unraveled in the tangled web of this veracious narrative.

CHAPTER L.

HONOR AMONG THIEVES.

THE Central Democratic Leverage Union in Whitechapel happened not to be in a very flourishing condition in regard of funds at this particular period of its history. Mr. Hercules Flaymar had been confining his oratorical energy to the metropolitan district, for the simple reason that he could not raise the necessary money for a provincial tour, and his brother Arcadian, the faithful Ferretman, was at the lowest ebb, legal business of his sort, *i.e.*, connected with the County Courts, being singularly slack. In fact, the pair met one fine morning, *sans* breakfast, and with a smallest probability of dinner.

"Ferretman," quoth Flaymar, after a hasty wag of his friend's not very clean paw, "oblige me with sixpence for half an hour! I —ahem—must positively have a cup of coffee and a roll. I'm nowhere."

"Haven't got a mag," responded the other. "You couldn't raise a bob for two cups and two rolls, could you?"

"I thought," said Flaymar, scornfully, "that some client of yours, Digman, Migman, Bigman—you know who I mean—was going to part? I don't much see the use of being a lawyer if your clients never pay."

"Nor," retorted Ferretman, "of being a popular leader if the populace won't shell out. I'm hungry."

"So am I," muttered Hercules Flaymar, fiercely.

"And I don't see my road to anything in particular between now and to-morrow," grunted Mr. Ferretman.

"Nor I. Couldn't you manage a copper or so? A roll without the coffee might be preferable to nothing."

"I'm good for a half-penny and a farthing," laughed the lawyer, bitterly, extracting these coins from his pocket.

"And I," growled Flaymar, "can raise a—a"—fumbling in his pockets—"a far—no, by the powers; it's a threepenny bit, and I didn't dream I was so rich. That's two penny rolls and—"

"Better say cheese," observed the other, turning down the corner of his mouth. "It sticks—does cheese!"

"The awkwardness is," replied Flaymar, "that my silver and your browns don't make the requisite fourpence."

"What's the odds?"

"I really couldn't ask for three ha'porth of cheese."

"You couldn't? I could. I should tell them I wanted it to bait the mouse-trap with."

"And then they'd give it you walking about! No, not for me!"

"Well, Flaymar," responded the lawyer, "I don't mind, as you're that proud. I don't mind, for friendship's sake, going round the corner and buying the grub, or you can go if you'd rather."

"Faugh!" snorted the august Flaymar, "to think of the future President of the Great British Republic, chaffering about cheese! There, my good fellow, take your blessed threepenny bit and my blessing! Make tracks for the coffee-shop and look sharp back, for the President of the Republic is empty."

"All right," sniveled Ferretman, grasping the small coin and disappearing like greased lightning.

In about ten minutes, the mice of the Democratic Leverage Union, the only democrats, bar Mr. Flaymar, on the spot, might, if they had had the requisite aural organization, have heard their mighty orator inquire of his inner anxious man what could have kept Ferretman? Ten minutes later they might have heard language savoring strangely of impatience, combined, moreover, with indignation. Yet ten minutes more and Hercules Flaymar's utterance would not have stood the test of stenography. The fellow was raging and raving, conscious now of the painful truth that his bosom-friend, his *fides Achates*, Ferretman—Ferretman the destined Vice-president of a Republic whose flag would float over at least five continents—more if they could be discovered—had been so unutterably base as to levant with the last token bearing the despised image and superscription of royalty—the very last that he could call his own.

Apropos, there was no further collation at hand than the cud of bitter disappointment. So he relieved his raging hunger by chewing that and a quill pen, pausing every now and then to fire off an unpronounceable word, like the minute-gun at sea of Russell's forgotten song.

He had just delivered himself, with the fury of a bull of Bashan, of a malediction on the infinitesimal orbits of Mr. Ferretman, when a tap at the door aroused his warmest expectations. It could not be the truant son of Themis—he would enter without that formula. But it might be some one with the fraction of sixpence handy, and under the circumstances anybody would do—even a Tory.

"Come in, whoever you are," he yelled.

"Me name, sorr, is Frayney. Oi'm from 'Frisco, sure, and Oi'd an appointment to mate an ould friend of moine at this same location, sorr. Me friend, sorr, is called Moike Conolly, sure, and—"

"Sir," said Hercules Flaymar, grasping his hand as though it were a stiff pump-handle, and exhibiting an excess of histrionic emotion—"sir, the man you name is my dearest friend in the world, and one who calls him by that sacred name is consecrated, sir, in my eyes. I would ask you, sir, to ratify this happy meeting by a pledge of affection—a loving cup—but my clerk is unfortunately absent for the moment, and he has the keys of the cash-box."

"Thim felleys," remarked Frayney, "is always on iverybodie's business except their own, h'when they're wanted, sure. But, me dear sorr, if ye'll do me the honor now?"

"Don't mention it," observed Hercules with an air of splendid patronage. "You shall stand treat to me, and next time the process shall be reversed. The Maculate Boar boasts the best drink in this locality, and their pork-pies are— Do you ever eat pork-pies?"

"Bedad, Oi'm not porticular, sorr. But, atther you."

Pies of equivocal pig, and stout containing every variety of nastiness conceivable, quite exhilarated Hercules. He orated loudly. He glorified himself in the presence of a sweep, a coster, and a slaughterman. He rolled his eyes, and patted Frayney affectionately on the back. His whole nature underwent a transformation scene, and when he emerged from the portals of that filthy tavern, his demeanor was—splendid.

They were strolling back to his office, as Frayney put it, "arrum-in-arrum," when the latter suddenly started, and averted his head clumsily.

But to no purpose. In a trice a stout gentleman of rather martial gait had confronted him with, "Halloo, hal-loo, my—friend, we have met before?"

It was Frayney's turn now to metamorphose himself, and he did so promptly, changing from the mildest *bon enfant* to the reckless rowdy, with the rapidity of a histrionic chameleon.

"You'd better not round on won of us," growled he, between his teeth. "Bedad, thin, it's mesilf knows Capthain Dol'py, as well as he knows me."

"Come, come," cried that amiable worthy, "what's the fun of this style of thing? We're friends, aren't we, Pat Frayney? Here, my boy, introduce me to your pal, whoever he is, and come to my warehouse if you want to take a really superlative glass of the real thing."

The eyes of Hercules Flaymar twinkled. What! More liquor? Biscuits, too, probably! He would lay in a store of provisions internally, sufficient to last till to-morrow's breakfast, or even longer.

"Your most obedient," responded Frayney, dropping the rowdy sharp, "and Oi'll be proud, Oi will, to taste your honor's potheen. But—awish!—jist won little minit. Oi'm on the lookout for a darlint bhoy—won Moike Conolly."

"What!" cried Dolopy, under his breath. "Then Mike escaped, did he? I fancied you both had been—"

"Sorra a bit, capthain. But be this and be that, Moike's nose is vis'ble to the naked oye there sitthin' in your office, Misther Flaymar. Pass the worrud, sorr. Moike would be grayved, he would, to be annyh'wheres except h'where the dhrink was."

In half a second Mike had joined them, and to his amazement received the warmest welcome from Captain Dolopy. Without delay they all adjourned to that gentleman's factory, when, under the influence of vintage wines manufactured in accordance with the latest researches of an enlightened practical chemist on the premises, the human tongue began to wag furiously.

This, apparently, was very much in accordance with the wishes of Captain Dolopy, who was anxious, for reasons of his own, both to

improve this chance meeting, and also to ascertain, as a preliminary, who and what the large man, with the large mouth and large ideas, might be.

On this latter point he was not left long in the dark. It was never the custom of Hercules Flaymar to enter any society without proclaiming the nature of his mission; but when his rhetoric happened to be quickened by alcohol, an innate genius for self-laudation became intensified.

"You, sir," he said, with vinous tears in his eyes, "must surely be a Republican. Your every word, act, thought, demonstrates a large sympathy with the aspirations of humanity."

"Certainly," replied the captain. "You anticipate my sentiments in a very remarkable degree. But if you wish me to vote for the Democratic ticket, you must first show me that I'm going to make a pull out of it somehow—as a matter of business, you know?"

Hercules Flaymar, for the first time in his life, felt posed, more especially as his Hibernian friends showed signs of laughing at his discomfiture.

"The pull, sir," he stammered, "is perfect equality."

"Indeed! replied Dolopy. "Then that's not good enough. If you can make me a preference shareholder, or give me a seat on the board, I'll underwrite, provided your company looks like taking the public; not otherwise."

"The captain's a business man," quoth Frayney, admiringly. "It's the winnin' horse he's for ridin', sure!"

"Right you are," answered Dolopy, in his normal, sharp, crisp way. "And, by the bye, as we are here, there may be a bit of business to be arranged. Listen. When that rough specimen of aristocracy, Robert Marmyon, gave every one the slip, he fell in with a certain parson, a dodger who could turn a chap like that round his finger. Well, the parson found him one of your sort, sir—turning to Flaymar—a Republican. He converted him kerslap to Tory principles and religion. To cut my tale short, the fellow has dropped your lot forever, and means to turn parson himself."

"Impossible!" roared Flaymar. "He daren't!"

"I'm not gassing," replied Dolopy. "It's fact. But it would not signify a button were it not that I and others are interested in Errol Marmyon succeeding to the family estates. Now, gentlemen, you have that sort of wink which is said to be as good as a nod."

"Bedad, thin," remarked Mike, earnestly, "if not inconvaynient, it moight be agrayable to arrange an interview wid that same Misther Errol Marmyon."

"Right. Suppose we say to-morrow, at noon? This place. You'll find some liquors going at that hour, and I'll bring my man up to town. And now, gentlemen, to men engaged in finance—as I am—time is the one most necessary article next to money, so forgive me if I say *au revoir* till to-morrow"

At this hint they all trooped out; Flaymar, however, an instant after hurrying back.

"Beg pardon," he said, "but my clerk has gone to—ahem—Hoxton on business. I must keep my eye on these Irishmen, or they'll be off on the spree. Could you advance me a little loose silver till to-morrow?"

Captain Dolopy's face wore a shade of suspicion, but he fished out five shillings, albeit with the air of a man who was tapping his heart's blood.

"Thanks, much," returned Hercules, airily, as he at once hurried after his Hibernian friends.

The trio marched leisurely to the quarters of the Central Democratic Leverage Union, the president of that important political organization feeling about two foot taller as he jingled the brace of half-crowns in his pocket. At the door they discovered a very small boy with a very empty inside, a very eager countenance, and clothes, or rather fractures of what once might have been clothes, to match. The child appeared to have washed his face in the dirtiest puddle in Whitechapel, and his feet, which were visible to the naked eye, in something even filthier. Technically this boy would be termed a waif or an Arab. Practically he was one of those accidents of an exalted civilization that are talked about and written about and preached about, but are left to hunger on, and thieve on, and learn the fine arts of criminality under the ablest professors of the most distinguished school in the universe.

"Please, sir, are you Mister Flamin'?"

"My name," responded Hercules, magnificently, "is Flaymar. Flaymar, remember. What have you got there, my boy?"

"Gentleman give me this letter for Mister Flamin', and he say, says he, take that to Mister Flamin', he says, and he'll give you a penny."

"Give me the letter."

"Not afore you gives me the penny. Walker!"

In a case of this sort "Walker" sometimes means *solvitur ambulando*. Hercules therefore did not stop to argue, but in a trice gripped the boy and seized the letter.

"Wot a shame!" howled the hungry one. "And you calls yourself a gentleman!"

But Mr. Hercules Flaymar was too deeply engrossed in this epistle, which was written in pencil on the reverse portion of a poster, torn down, apparently, from a boarding, to attend to the boy's objurgations, or the pitiful appeal for bread which followed them. Philanthropy of the slushy sort was not the foible of that great man, whose mind was so engrossed on the regeneration of the species by the leverage of a political nostrum as to be incapable of recognizing individual grievances.

The letter in question was penned, or rather penciled, by the astute and highly moral Mr. Ferretman. It ran thus:

"Dear Flaymar, — After much serious consideration I have come to the determination to resign my connection with the Central Democratic Leverage Union. Political agitation has already injured my business connection, besides occupying so large a portion of my time unprofitably. Moreover, I should not be rendering my motives full justice if in tendering my resignation I omitted to state that my opinions have recently undergone some modification—in fact I have now decided in future to associate myself with the great Tory party, which absorbs so large an amount of the wealth, education, and intelligence of this great country. I shall always entertain a strong

personal regard for you individually, and for your colleagues of the C. D. L. U., and you, I trust, will understand and appreciate the line I have taken, and the honorable motives by which I am actuated.

"I remain, my dear Flaymar,

"Yours faithfully,

"N. FERRETMAN.

"P.S.—I will make out my bill of costs. The C. D. L. U. are indebted to me for my professional services to the extent of about £100. From that total I deduct the sum of threepence, advanced by you to me this morning. N. F."

"Ugh! Disgusting!" howled Mr. Hercules Flaymar, as after perusing this really abominable document he tore it into pieces, stamped them under his foot, and condemned them to eternal perdition. After which solemn performance he was about to enter his office when the wretched boy plucked his coat with the piteous cry: "I say, guv'nor, act on the square. I'm werry hungry; ain't 'ad no grub since—"

But the sentence was cut short, for the heavy open palm of the might orator and leader of men came down like a Nasmyth hammer on the boy's cheek, and laid him flat and howling in the gutter.

Then this sublime moral force proudly passed his own portal, and in the sublime consciousness of speculative magnanimity slammed the door.

CHAPTER LI.

SIR ROBERT'S EYES ARE OPENED.

POLLY WILLIAMS did not recover quite so rapidly as the local Esculapius imagined. The girl was, like most of her sex who have the benefit from childhood of country air and wholesome ways, robust in respect of constitution, though her form and features were as delicate as those of the most refined lady. But for long weeks her mind had been overwrought; and though she knew it not, or knowing, recked less than little, she was in a highly febrile condition before the catastrophe at Reffern Lake. That shock to her system involved, in fact, consequences far more serious than the doctor, skillful as he was, could have anticipated.

Over her with ardent fidelity Robert kept watch and ward—indeed it was with difficulty that Mrs. Williams persuaded him to go up to the Court in obedience to a rather peremptory mandate from his father—even for an hour.

He did, however suffer himself to be so persuaded, and oddly enough, *en route* to the Court, met Plantagenet.

"How is the poor girl?" inquired that big man, bluntly.

"Bad," responded Robert.

"Not in danger, I hope?"

"I'm not sure of that. Wish I was."

"Ugh!" ejaculated Plantagenet, with a shrug of the shoulders, "You're sorry now it's too late. After having played the part of a villain toward that poor—"

"A villain!"

"Yes, a villain. She was your sweetheart. You had no just cause for jealousy, and if you had, you ought not to have turned your back on her at the very moment when you were suddenly elevated from the plow to the Court. It didn't look well, and that's plain."

"You are hard on me, sir."

"No. I speak as a man of honor. Had I stood in your shoes I would have fought for that girl, but I would never have deserted her. Your common-sense ought to have told you that the acme of baseness is to play tricks with a girl's heart."

"You won't have cause to blame me now," was all that Robert could urge as he passed on toward the great house.

He found Sir Robert rather fussy and worried. The baronet was polite and in manner cordial, but at a glance Robert perceived that his continued residence under Shepherd Williams's roof was galling to the great man's pride.

"My dear fellow," he began, "I've sent for you to beg that you will resume some sort of intercourse with your home. I raised no objection to your absence for the nonce—under the circumstances. We all felt that so much devotion on your part was quite creditable and merited our respect. But there must be a limit. Your social position and that of er—ah—the worthy shepherd are incompatible. You will, I conclude, marry his daughter, and I shall then set him up in a farm on your mother's small estate in Huntingdonshire, for, of course, though you marry the girl you don't marry her family. But, in the interim, please oblige me by preserving your station. Your relations, my dear son, are not shepherds and that kind of thing—they are gentle-people, humble gentle-people in their own way, but gentle-people."

"I see," said Robert. "You expect me to keep on my lion's skin, though I am but an ass."

"Not so. I object to your wearing an ass's skin, being as you are a lion. But enough of metaphor. Breakfast, dine, and sleep here, and devote your entire day to the poor sufferer. Is that a fair compromise?"

"May I be excused dinner?" pleaded Robert, who rather dreaded that solemn social ordeal.

"Of course, if it must be so; that is, until you can give a more favorable report of your—er—ah—invalid."

Robert had it in his heart to open the ball about his future, but a glance at the baronet's countenance warned him that the moment was inopportune; in fact, the latter broke out with, "I am more than bothered, Robert. That fellow Horace St. Vincent, as you know, is Lady Marmyon's cousin, and that circumstance renders our mutual relations exceedingly difficult. The fellow is—er—ah—a gentleman by birth, and very attractive in every way, but he has the soul of a cad—of a cad, I repeat, Robert. He has not only converted moneys with which I intrusted him, to his own base uses, gambling and profligacy, but he has had the effrontery to write and demand more, on account of alleged expenses in America. All I can say is, that if he were not a relative, I would crush him for a swindling rascal." And the baronet's wrath caused him to cough and splutter. "But that is not all. The ruffian writer offers to sell certain val-

uable information concerning Errol and Mrs. Frankalmoign. What does it all mean? I really don't care, though the lady is under my roof now, to ask her; yet St. Vincent writes as though some hideous sword of Damocles, some disgrace, were impending. Upon my word, between you all my gray hairs will descend with sorrow to the grave."

"I'm sorry you include me," remarked Robert, gravely.

"Er—ah—I don't think I do. Your errors, whatever they may be, lie on the surface. You've been tarred with a plebeian brush, but there's no mystery about you—no deception. It's a comfort to reflect that you at all events tell the truth."

"How do you do, Robert?" at this moment uttered a very ladylike voice, and Mrs. Frankalmoign, unbidden, entered Sir Robert's sanctum. It was indeed a very unusual occurrence for any member of her sex, with the single exception of my lady, to intrude within that sacred apartment, and the baronet looked at her as much as to say, "I wonder if you've been eavesdropping?" His manner was, however, as usual, perfect, and he placed the lady in an armchair by his side, at the same time signaling to Robert to retire—a hint by no means lost, inasmuch as the young man was burning to return to Polly Williams.

"My dear Sir Robert," commenced the lady, in the most dulcet of tones, "I've come to—ahem—consult you—"

Sir Robert tried to smile, and bowed. "About my dear child Ida. You know how unworldly the girl is; how impressionable, how simple, how very, very earnest. If I were to add that she was also inclined to be headstrong, I should not quite overstep the bounds of truth."

Sir Robert looked as much as to say, "What next?" But he contented himself with another forced smile. "I did hope—it was my ambition—that she would bestow her affections on Errol, who was only too anxious to come forward. But"—with a sigh—"it was not to be."

"Indeed!" remarked Sir Robert, quietly. "We too hoped that the young people might agree, but of course Errol's prospects have undergone a change."

"It is not that—emphatically not. I think, that is to say I believe, that Errol would have gained Ida but for an adverse influence—Horace St. Vincent."

"Blackguard!" muttered the baronet between his teeth.

"As you remark," said the lady, pursily, "a most undesirable attachment! Happily, Ida is disillusioned, and for what reason I need not say. She came here with paled roses and an empty heart. You may have remarked that her roses have returned, and that her spirits have regained their elasticity?"

"I'm very glad. Marmyon air is splendid."

"That is not all. Ida is not one of those girls who can exist on mere air. She must be under an influence, and when the influence is genial she thrives."

Sir Robert assumed a puzzled air. This was an enigma.

"And that is the reason," continued Mrs. Frankalmoign, "why I have ventured to intrude on Sir Robert Marmyon's privacy this morning."

"Pray, pray, don't say intrude; say, rather, brighten. But I am still in the dark. Ida, you tell me, has developed a sort of *penchant* for some one here. Suely you can not mean poor Robert. He, alas! is already captured."

"I do not allude to Robert," replied Mrs. Frankalmoign, with almost asperity. "He is a dear, good fellow, but you know—not quite—don't you see?"

"Certainly."

"No. Ida's preference, and it has assumed a very positive form, is for Plantagenet."

"I'm sure we all shall feel as glad as if it had been one of our own blood," ejaculated, with warmth, the impulsive baronet. "Planny is a noble fellow. I am proud of him."

"Quite so," smiled the lady. "Then your aid, please. Planny is shy—*mauvaise honte*, you know. Wild horses could not induce him to speak to Ida, and Ida, of course, can not take the initiative, though they were once engaged. You, Sir Robert, alone can."

"Oh, I'll give him a hint of the most direct kind," responded the baronet. "You may rely on that."

"Thanks. But that is not the sum-total of my diplomatic mission. Could you not persuade him to drop that dreadful 'Hodge'?"

"Of course. Most objectionable. I've offered to adopt him, and give him our name. He must, he shall, accept my offer. He has been Marmyon all his life. Let him stick to the name. He is not the man to disgrace it."

"Yes," acquiesced the crafty lady; "and one other request, please, then I will retire."

Sir Robert laughed good-humoredly.

"I approach this last topic with extreme diffidence," said the maneuvering mamma. "It is, in plain English, finance. Are you prepared to—ahem!—endow Planny as your adopted son?"

"He has an annuity—that is all."

"No fortune to settle on a future wife?"

"None. But in this case there can be no necessity. Ida's fortune is more than ample."

"Sir Robert, to be frank, I have to safeguard myself. I am not old. If Ida marries, and takes her fund out of the common stock—I—"

"Shall be a beggar," cried a voice from behind the screen placed to keep the draught of the door from Sir Robert; and then, to Mrs. Frankalmoign's horror, Errol marched forward, and without offering his hand confronted her. He had come down from London for that very purpose.

There was a dead, a hideous pause, the wily lady's dress indicating her emotion, her blanched lips the terror of one brought to bay.

"Suppose," remarked Errol, coolly, "before you try to jockey my father, you refund that £25,000 you tricked me out of."

Sir Robert Marmyon rose, but he did not utter.

"Sir," stammered the lady, "you insult me. My solicitor shall answer this unfounded charge."

"Quite unnecessary. I borrowed £50,000 on my reversion, under the supposition I was heir. Your solicitor, who is your relative and confederate, pretended that he required your name as surety to the

bond, and on that plea I consented to advance half the loan, the conditions being understood between us. I have since ascertained that you did not become surety, that you are not liable, and that I am. Nay more, I have to secure the lender further, or to stand the racket of an action for false pretenses. Now, madam!"

"What!" demanded Sir Robert. "What is this?"

But Mrs. Frankalmoign, with a stately bow, had disappeared. Her sole mainstay under such a fusillade of accusations was her manner, and that never deserted her. She swept out of the room in all the splendor of injured innocence.

Then Errol sat down by his sire's side and made a plenary confession, at the close whereof the bell was rung, and a carriage ordered to take Mrs. Frankalmoign to the station.

But before they left—box-packing in the case of ladies of fashion being a long business—Sir Robert called Plantagenet aside.

"Planny," he said, "you love Ida and Ida loves you. But it is fair to warn you that she hasn't a sixpence, and that her mother is a barefaced swindler. All I can say is, that if you marry the girl I'll increase your present allowance to a thousand a year. You had better, however, look before you leap."

"I dare neither look nor leap," he replied. "I am not in the running for Ida, and she knows it."

"Why not? What I affirm is absolute truth."

"Possibly. But a thousand pounds would not keep the Frankalmoign *ménage* going for a month, still less for a year."

"You are right there, Planny."

"And I am justified in affirming that Ida must marry money, or else her mother will succumb, not merely to poverty, but disgrace."

"I am aware of it. I can also tell you this—that even money will not save that woman if I hold up my little finger. Through your father—adopted father, if you will—you, Planny, are master of the situation. She is yours."

"Amen," murmured the solemn voice of the big man.

CHAPTER LII.

DYNAMITE.

WHEN in the evening Robert returned to the Court, he found there an almost empty drawing-room. The Frankalmoigns were gone, and with them Plantagenet. Lady Marmyon had retired early to roost, pained beyond expression by the incident of the morning, and Sir Robert and Errol were chatting gloomily in the corner, in a sort of undertone.

It was the first time since his return to England that he had encountered Errol, and the greeting on either side was the reverse of fraternal. For this the baronet was prepared, and hence with his normal tact he led the conversation, thereby keeping the brothers from a verbal collision. At the moment he almost regretted the embargo he had laid on Robert to transfer his quarters from Shepherd Williams's cottage to the Court. Perhaps he might have excused his absence had he anticipated Errol's visit, which, as may be surmised, was, as a matter-of-fact, wholly unexpected.

The tail of an evening spent on terms of such decided awkwardness came to a natural termination early. Sir Robert suggested bed a good nour before the usual roosting time, and Errol, who was hideously bored, eagerly indorsed the notion. So with the customary valediction the father and sons separated for the night.

It was midsummer—bright, beautiful, balmy. Night—for all that the life-giving sun was absent for a few short hours—seemed more livable than day itself in dreary, dark December, and as Robert leaned out of his oriel-window and listened to the alternate music of the nightingale, and the distant bell of Shepherd Williams's flock, he felt entranced by the scene.

He sat star-gazing, waking, dreaming, thinking thoughts that, like the weird harmonies of Beethoven's grander sonatas, seemed to be impressions rather than ideas; for how long he never knew, for he forgot to consult his watch. His reverie must have lasted into the silent small hours, since nature herself seemed stilled to exquisite silence, and he remembered afterward that he might have remained where he was spell-bound all the livelong night, but for something, a sort of indefinable shade, that in an instant came between his soul and his trance.

In short, he awoke to reality almost with a start, for, as he fancied, his ear caught the sound of a footfall on the grass below his window.

It was now darkening, and as his eyes peered into the gloom nothing was apparent. Doubtless, he thought, one of the deer had strayed from the herd near the gray walls of the Court, and its tramp was audible.

Then the footfall sounded again, and next his watch—as he supposed—began to tick with an unwonted noise. He had never before heard that admirable piece of mechanism thus attract his notice, and the singular "tick-tick-tick" worried him, and gave a sort of eerie, unpleasant, almost ghastly complexion to what had been a pleasurable night-watch. He had hours ago extinguished his candle, in order the better to enjoy the glories of a midsummer night's waking dream, and now he almost felt sorry, though neither a nervous nor a superstitious man, at possessing no light. Hastily, therefore, retreating toward his bed, he flung off his coat, and taking the watch from his pocket placed it by his side on the table.

It emitted no sound at all.

Then he recollected that he had forgotten to wind it up on the previous night at Shepherd Williams's, and that it had been stationary all day. And yet it had been ticking noisily—of that phenomenon his ears had been witness. That was strange, unaccountable, transcendental. In a positive mist of bewilderment he flung off his clothes, said his prayers, and turned in between the sheets—to sleep off his impressions, if he could.

That was not so easy, for the same ticking, though fainter, was still audible. He counted a hundred, and essayed to escape it, but no. His ears still beat to that tattoo; and it was not until he pulled the clothes over his head that it absolutely ceased, and sleep came as the sweet lenitive of a strange apprehensiveness, amounting—so he subsequently was wont to aver—to an unmistakable presentiment.

And as he slept, so also slept trustfully and sweetly the other in-

mates of Marmyon Court. Sir Robert, to bury in temporary oblivion the troubles that seemed to cast a dark shadow over his declining years; Lady Marmyon, to forget her intense vexation at the discovery of her bosom-friend, Mrs. Frankalmoign's, real character; Errol, to drown his bitterness at the sight of his detested brother, whom he regarded much as Esau may have viewed that plain man, dwelling in tents, who supplanted him by stratagem; Hester Mazebrook, to see visions of "company" quite beyond the extensive resources of the Court—her favorite nightmare; the footmen to dream of the public-house of the future; and the maids of liveried lovers—the entire household, in fine, slept as other households sleep, in quietness and confidence, fearing neither the burglar, nor the fire, nor the pestilence, and persuaded that all the world around their beds was peopled with honest friends.

For once, however, their calculation was erroneous. Night's lingering shades were already beginning to flee before the hasty return of the glorious midsummer sun, when, in an instant, without one note of warning, a crash, as it were, of the archangel's trump, awoke every sleeper with an electric shock, seismic in its intensity, while the roar of falling masonry revealed to each startled soul the awful truth of a catastrophe having occurred, the extent whereof could not be guessed.

That tick-tick-tick!—was it, after all, the note of a watch that had not been wound up, or was it the fateful beat of an infernal machine, timed only too accurately to deal destruction at a certain fixed minute with unerring punctuality?

The deed had been done—done, too, without the cognizance of Errol, who had flatly refused Dolopy's request to meet Flaymar, Conolly and Flayney, being at the moment much more concerned to arrange some sort of terms with Mr. Moseson, of Houndsditch. The deed was done, and the intended victim the man who had turned his back on that trio of rascality.

The deed was done. And in the dull gray of morning, ere yet the terrorized domestics and the awakened village could discover what was the extent of the injury, the owner of that proud demesne lay amid *débris*, senseless and wounded; and his heir in a pitiable condition, one mass of contusions and scars, though happily with unbroken bones.

Soon the sun came peeping over Flesset Wood, and then the crowd of rustics were able to gauge what had happened. Nitro-glycerine had wrecked the wing of the mansion, wherein were sleeping Sir Robert and Lady Marmyon on the first floor, and over them on the second floor their elder son. Errol, whose room was in the further wing, escaped without a scratch.

The damaged portion of the building exhibited a chaotic appearance. An immense fissure had dichotomized the gable end. There was a large cavity created in the wall, the dining-room on the ground-floor was a wreck, and the state bedroom above simply choked. It was the labor of two hours to extricate the unfortunate baronet; and when he and his wife, both bleeding and insensible, were borne to another chamber the bystanders took them for dead. Robert was extricated more easily. His appearance—he was streaming with blood from flesh wounds inflicted by splinters—was so

ghastly that the man who pulled him out of the wreckage imagined that he was seriously damaged. This, however, was not the case. The shock, as may be anticipated, had for the nonce shattered his nerves; but in the general chaos he had fared fortunately as compared with his father and mother.

In the wild confusion that ensued Errol, for the first time in his life, displayed what may be termed a moral quality. In a trice he realized what had happened, and with speed was to the fore, issuing orders and assuming the functions of controller-general. By his energy and head-piece the sufferers were extricated with all possible expedition, while with promptitude the telegraph-wires communicated to headquarters the outrage, and gave them the earliest possible opportunity for detecting its perpetrators.

That, however—to anticipate—was no easy task. The abolition of turnpikes, though a boon to travelers, renders the detection of crime in the rural districts doubly difficult. Indeed, the only clew obtainable was from an old man, who had seen a dog-cart containing two men driving toward Marmyon between the hours of midnight and 1 A.M. That was literally all.

Captain Dolopy might have thrown some light on the outrage—albeit not concerned in it—but he did not care to mix his name with any such villainy. Besides which, he had a wholesome horror of Hibernian vendetta, and he entertained a shrewd notion that were he to turn informer his skin might not remain intact for a prolonged period.

And so, struck down by an unseen hand, the proud baronet lay lingering. By a strange coincidence they placed him in that very room, and on that very bed, where of yore Hodge, the laborer's wife, had lain to suckle her own son, and to laugh in her sleeve at the deception. There for weeks the poor gentleman remained, sometimes semi-conscious, sometimes with a lucid interval, which he spent less in attending to the ministrations of Mr. Orphrey than in moaning over the injury inflicted on Marmyon Court. Till then nobody knew how completely his whole soul was wrapped up in this mansion, the center-point of his life-long pride, and now its collapse, though it was but partial, added a sting to the bitterness of death.

For he did not survive the blow, nor was his passage hence quite as he had mentally depicted it. No wife, no fond children, surrounded his death-bed. Errol came to him, but he cared little for his presence. Robert he barely recognized. His wife was delirious, and for the nonce in danger, albeit she eventually recovered. Once, and once only, he begged Hester Mazebrook, his kind and loving nurse, to send for Plantagenet, and when that fine fellow came to his bedside he warmed to something like earnestness. But in the main he was indifferent, and his tears, which were incessant, flowed entirely for Marmyon Court. Like certain animals to whom home is more than their species, his longest, last, and truest love was for the Court, and when that edifice of his affection was shorn of its grace and beauty—and indeed reduced in part to a mere ruin—he felt that it was high time its feudal lord should go.

"Tell them," were his last injunctions, "to write on my tomb, *Sic transit gloria mundi.*"

"What's that you say, Sir Robert?" sobbed Hester.

"Er—ah, I was forgetting. Get a sheet of paper and a pen. Now, write precisely as I dictate." And he positively spelled the words, letter by letter. You may see them now, if you care to undertake a pilgrimage so far, at the base of the recumbent effigy, erected in his honor by his widow, and sculptured in white marble by Pheidias, R. A., in the chancel of Marmyon Church.

CHAPTER LIII.

TWO LOVES AND A TALK.

Love was a good friend to Plantagenet, for had he not been wafted away from Marmyon Court on her wings he must infallibly have suffered in limb if not in life by the explosion, since the chamber allotted to him—his old room hallowed by the associations of a lifetime—was next to that of the baronet and his wife. Nevertheless, the course of that delicious stream did not at first flow quite smoothly: in fact, after leaving the Court with Mrs. Frankalmoign and Ida, he enjoyed the luxury of a *mauvais quart d'heure.*

Until they reached the railway-station little was said. Mrs. Frankalmoign's cheeks were vulgarly red, her eyes were flashing fiercely, and her mouth—once universally admired—was pursed up. But her tongue was quiet. She was in truth too outraged to utter.

Eve, if the mother of silvern speech, cannot be said to have originated golden silence. Eve out of temper, and more particularly Eve when totally in the wrong, is gifted commonly with rhetorical powers of the irrepressible variety. Hence, as soon as Mrs. Frankalmoign found herself actually anchored in a railway-carriage with the train in motion and nobody within ear-shot except her daughter and Plantagenet, she at once, with a preliminary shriek, let off steam.

"I wonder," she gasped, hysterically, "that you two people can sit there and see me so basely insulted."

"Well, mother," pleaded Ida, rather scornfully, "what would you have us do? We can't very well *stand.*"

"Ugh!" flounced the elder lady, "just like your heartlessness. The idea of that man, Errol, daring to accuse me in that way. Why, Plantagenet, if you were a man you would have strangled the fellow."

"You forget," replied Plantagenet, demurely, "I was not present."

"An excuse, a mere excuse. And you, Ida, you never took your mother's part. You never—"

"Made a goose of myself, mother. Of course I didn't. I told you from the first that no good would come of all your financial maneuvering, and now you see I was right. Don't blame me, or any one else but yourself."

"Well," shrieked Mrs. Frankalmoign, "and suppose, girl, your mother is to blame? Is that any reason why I, a lady, should be charged with swindling? Is that any reason, please, why my daughter should so far fail in her duty as never to utter a word on my behalf? Is that any reason why the man who—"

"If you please, mother, interposed Ida, reddening, "remember what is due to me, even if you choose to forget what is due to yourself."

"Faugh! Don't dictate to me. I *will* speak. I *will* be heard, too. I repeat, is that any reason why the man who aspires to—"

"Mother, you SHALL restrain yourself."

"Ida, I can't, and I won't. That man there is your suitor, and as such he ought to have taken my part."

There was a coarseness in this, rather more suggestive of the relative of Lawyer Hubble than of a long intimacy with Belgravian drawing-rooms. It caused Ida to hide her face with her hands in horror.

"I don't know," after a pause, a painful pause, rejoined Plantagenet, in a low bass voice—"I don't know, Mrs. Frankalmoign, why you select me as an object of animadversion, or why you should connect your daughter's name with mine. But as I feel, in consequence, challenged to speak, I confess that my sentiments are clearly an open secret, and that if they should be"—glancing at Ida, who had dropped her hands on her lap—"reciprocated, I should indeed be a proud man."

It was Ida's turn to look at him, and her look seemed to say far more than words. But she simply remarked, with maidenly reserve, "Whatever I think, or whatever I may feel, I don't intend to talk about it now."

"I can wait," smiled Plantagenet. "I have waited, Heaven knows, patiently and faithfully."

"You have," whispered Ida, almost inaudibly.

"But I can tell you this," said Plantagenet, addressing himself quietly to the elder lady, "that if events turn out as I hope, you need not alarm yourself concerning Errol."

"I don't," snapped that lady. "What can Errol do?"

"Ah! there you pose me. I can't tell you, but I suspect the cards in his hand might be awkward. You must know better than I."

"He might sue me."

"Is that all—quite all?"

"I'm sure I can't say. All I know is," bursting into a flood of tears, "that you're all in league against me. It's abominable."

"Upon my honor, mother," cried Ida, "that is quite too bad, considering that Plantagenet has just told you in so many words that his influence will hold you harmless. Really, under the circumstances, you might be a trifle more gracious." But this remonstrance did not appease, though it certainly succeeded in quieting, Mrs. Frankalmoign, who, after a prolonged fit of sobbing, applied her visage diligently to her vinaigrette and tried to compose her features.

And so in enforced silence they sat gazing out of the windows until at last Victoria was reached, and Plantagenet hurried off to discover some sort of vehicle wherein to convey the ladies to Berkeley Street.

He was absent some some five minutes. There was a race meeting on, and the station happened to be overcrowded with a type of Briton whose manners and morals might be mended with advantage to society. Accidentally or on purpose Ida, as being the loveliest

object on the platform, found herself repeatedly, and as she fancied intrusively, jostled, so she suggested an immediate flight in the direction of the public apartment supposed to be sacred to ladies, albeit the quality of the ladyhood infesting it chances to be more often than not equivocal.

They had contrived by a circuitous path almost to reach that haven of refuge when a biggish book-maker, with a purple hat and much liquor on board, pushed his vinous self between them, and thereby forcibly parted them. Ida at once resolutely, but with difficulty, dodged round the man, and fled in the direction of the waiting-room, where she landed safely. Her mother being less light of foot was about to follow, when she found herself confronted by no less a personage than Horace St. Vincent, who also—after the fashion of the crowd—seemed to have been paying some attention to the champagne, for his eyes were sparkling, his gait unsteady.

But however top-heavy this charming gentleman might be, and however perplexing his consonants might for the nonce seem to his lips, tongue, and teeth, his manner never deserted him.

"So ch—charmed to see Mrs. Fr—almoy," he hiccoughed. "Can I do sh—shushomethinng or other? Get cab?"

"No, thank you," replied the bewildered lady. "I'm looking for Ida. Where in the world can she have got to?"

"Ida losht? You dolt say Ida losht! Musht find her shomewhere! P'raps she's gone, put hat on, bonnet on, in she way'room?" And, his head filled with the idea that Ida might have betaken herself to that delightful gynœceum, Horace broke away from Mrs. Frankalmoign, staggered to the door of the lady's retiring-room, and without regarding the solemn monition, "For ladies only," heaved through it, and charged incontinently into the center of a bevy of—well, not exactly beauties.

His eye being unsteady, and his perpendicular likewise, he balanced himself against the wall and surveyed the crowd of indignant femininity.

"Why, there sh'is!" he exclaimed, suddenly, and then lurching across the room, greeted Ida.

"Mr. St. Vincent," rejoined the young lady, firmly, "oblige me by retiring. I will speak to you outside."

"All ri'. Beg par—par'on. No 'fence. Shertnly."

Whereupon as Horace, suddenly, for all his intipsification, realizing the incongruity of this proceeding, was about to withdraw, in a trice a gloved hand slapped his shoulder smartly, and a voice of the sort to send a shudder through Ida, vociferated, "Why, 'Oris, h'ole man, wot h'is yer up to in the ladies' room?"

It was only Miss Charlemagne of the Ambiguity ballet. That was all. She had been to the races, like the rest of the world; and after the best part of an hour in the train, had felt it expedient to add to her charms one more layer of hare's-foot.

As Horace turned toward the girl with a stupid, sleepy expression, Ida, her fine features betraying a mixture of horror and contempt, slipped past him, and in a trice met Plantagenet and accepted his arm. Then the pair roamed off in search of Mrs. Frankalmoign, who, with feminine logic, had never so much as dreamed that her

daughter could have found the ladies' room, and had been in consequence breathlessly traversing the station in search of her.

As they took their seats in the clarence, which Plantagenet had by dint of colossal energy secured for them, and were moving off, Ida saw something that caused her to put her head out of the window and look back.

The *tableau* consisted of Horace St. Vincent, who was being removed, struggling, by a brace of majestic policemen, while a ruddled girl was vainly endeavoring to persuade them to release him, and the foozled fellow himself not to resist; and soon as the carriage was turning the corner of the Grosvenor Hotel, her eye caught sight of the man she had once deemed the acme of breeding and *esprit* landed on the pavement, while Miss Charlemagne, purse in hand, was essaying to bribe the officers of the law.

That was enough. Ida, nauseated by that sorry spectacle, glanced timidly at the big, honest fellow, her *vis-à-vis*, and realized for the first time, perhaps, the superiority of manhood over effeminacy, of truth and tenderness over flippant falsity. Then and there her die was cast, and she felt in her inmost soul that it was cast wisely and well.

Plantagenet dined with them in the evening, and afterward formally proposed and was accepted, without the shade of *arrière pensée*. Ida was his; not, perhaps, madly or rapturously; not with the wild *abandon* wherewith she would have surrendered her life in blind confidence to Horace St. Vincent; but with all sincerity.

"You must remember," he said, for he would not have her take him, except for exactly what he was worth—"you must remember that I am plebeian. My father was an agricultural laborer; my mother for years kept a pothouse. I am of the earth, earthy. My hands bear witness to my origin, so do my feet, so do my muscles. I am no gentleman by right, only by a sort of veneer, and I suppose my mind was made to correspond. There's not much of the poet, or artist, or æsthete about me. At best I am only an athlete and sportsman. Don't you think," with a smile, "you're going to make a mistake?"

"Well," laughed Ida, "everybody knows all about you, but few, if any, all about us. Listen, and I think you will have to confess that it's not a case of two for me and one for you, but very much of two apiece. A man named Smith, who drove the fast coach from London to Birmingham, long before the railways, had one wet day for his box-seat a young widow. Her name was Frankalmoign, or rather I should say was supposed by a polite fiction so to be, for it is more than dubious whether she was married to Mr. Frankalmoign, of Dukesbury. I am afraid, indeed, that their relations were not altogether as matrimonial as one might wish. Anyhow, he had died recently and left a large fortune to this lady who was the box-seat on that memorable occasion. Well, the story goes that this hypothetical widow and coachee Smith made love along the road, and married in haste. Smith in consequence became Frankalmoign—he had no earthly business to make himself anything of the kind—and my father was the only child of the marriage. So that, as you perceive, all the talk about our being an old family is simply balderdash. Our real name is Smith, and our origin the coach-box;

while, oddly enough, mother, for curiosity's sake, was making some inquiries as to who Smith was, in consequence of an advertisement concerning some unclaimed property, she discovered that coachee's papa kept the 'Spotted Dog,' or some such vile hole in Birmingham itself, and that his brother was hanged for sheep-stealing. In fact, it's my humble conviction that the less closely pedigrees are scrutinized the prettier they look."

"But," rejoined Plantagenet, "your mother is a lady."

"My mother," replied Ida, "was at starting a dressmaker in Regent Street. My father, Mr. Coventry Frankalmoign, fell in love with her, educated her after marriage, and being himself a man of polish, having gone through the mill of Eton and Oxford, contrived to get her into society. He started her nephew, a wretched animal of the name of Hubble, as a lawyer, and—"

"Ah!" ejaculated Plantagenet, "I see it all now, and, to be candid, I'm not sorry we meet on the same sort of level."

"Yes," she pleaded, coaxingly; "but you know, things being as they are, and the world having such a very strong predilection for humbug, I fancy it would be policy for you, and certainly more pleasant for me, to stick to the good name of Marmyon. It might be more honest for Miss Smith to marry Mr. Hodge, but, don't you know, that sort of honesty is—ahem!—rather out of place. Besides which, surely it is truer tonality for pretty people to be known by pretty names than ugly ones. One cannot imagine the Apollo Belvedere as Bob Brown, or the Venus di Medici under the guise of Sarah Ann. Am I right?"

"That," laughed Plantagenet, "is an argument which carries conviction. Besides, candidly, I don't mind being Marmyon, and I somehow feel all overish, if anyone flings Hodge at my head. It's snobbishness, I own, of the most contemptible sort, but if great minds are not free from foibles, why should not little ones be permitted them?"

"Anyhow," chimed in Ida, "as Sir Robert has virtually adopted you, you have a far better title to use the name of Marmyon than ever our people had to that of Frankalmoign. Our nomenclature was a fraud—an impudent deception, and the wonder to me is that we were not publicly denounced by the real genuine Frankalmoigns, who are, I am told, a family of antiquity, though, as often happens, hideously poor. Whereas, so far as you are concerned, all is fair and square."

"After all," replied Plantagenet, "what does it matter? You are yourself; and I am myself. Plaster either of us with the biggest polysyllable in the peerage, or the ugliest monosyllable to be found on the roll of the nearest workhouse, and we shall not be altered in body or soul one little bit. It makes, of course, immense difference to our happiness whether we are poor or—"

"Ah!" shuddered Ida, "there you strike a tender chord. It was downright wicked of my mother to make away with my money."

"I am not sorry," rejoined Plantagenet, proudly.

"Why not? Are you insane?"

"On the contrary, plain and practical, though prejudiced. I don't like dirty money. I don't believe in true happiness resulting from coin amassed dishonorably. Now, from what you tell me,

this fortune, bequeathed by old Frankalmoign to the woman who afterward became Smith, your grandmother, was—to put it bluntly—the wages of iniquity. Faugh! I'm glad the vile stuff does not smirch your fingers or mine. I can wait and hope."

Ida cast her eyes down. "Yes," she faltered, "your nature, your aims, are loftier than mine. I have much to learn from you."

"And I from you—far more. Why has the world so far progressed? Because every male child born is his father's duplicate, only purified and refined in part by his mother. Moreover, every man who marries his love undergoes, I am persuaded, a second refining process; and thus, before the grave closes the scene, may be—ought to be—less of a brute, and fitter for a higher existence."

"And yet you say you are not a poet?"

"Nor am I, unless to collate the phenomena of existence be poetry."

"But," she pleaded, "it is poetry to believe in women."

"Yes," he responded, earnestly, "it is poetry—immortal poetry—to believe in *you!*"

That was all. They were mated, this big *he* and little *she*, though not altogether on Dresden China lines, since Watteau would never have paired six foot four with five foot five, and both in the pictures and in the fictile art they don't take account of such an abstract idea as the human heart. *Altro*, for all that our *he* and *she* were very happy—and who cares to be more?

EPILOGUE.

THUS gravitates toward its conclusion our narrative of the forces that influence life—the life of this epoch. Walk down Piccadilly any fine morning and you will meet, I dare wager, between lunch and dinner, during the season, Sir Robert and Lady Marmyon, Mrs. and Ida Frankalmoign, Errol, Plantagenet, Horace St. Vincent, Captain Dolopy, the Skrumpelby family—or their duplicates. Further east you will encounter Hubble, Fernetman, Flaymar, Conolly, or their fac-similes. Down in the shires, by diligent search, you may discover Fathers Orphrey and L'Isle, the Hodge family, Widow Gipps, Farmer Rodd, Robert, the heir, Shepherd Williams, his wife and daughter, and honest Hester Mazebrook. I know them all, or have known them in my time, as also somewhat of their secret thoughts, and much of their works and ways.

But the reader will say, "You are omitting your heroine—that vast tract of English soil, conquered and fertilized by English industry—the broad acres of Marmyon!"

Patience. We are coming to her presently. Her fate, like that of every other estate, is bound up in the character and motives of her owner. Under Sir Robert Marmyon she feasted the rich but starved the poor. She filled with good things those who needed them not, and sent the hungry empty away. Now she is about to awaken to a sense of moral responsibility, for her new owner is one who has himself fasted and toiled, and his heart is with those who earn what they eat.

But I am anticipating. Let us return once more to the narrative,

and tell in the fewest words how it fared with those human beings whose lives and fortunes we have been following through these long columns of print.

When Sir Robert, with the requisite and necessary pomp, was laid in the family vault, the question of heirship came positively under the eye of the gentlemen of the long robe. Robert—under advice—took possession, but a special act of Parliament was recommended in order to secure his heirs, should he have any. It was pointed out that, inasmuch as there was still some legal incertitude as to the rightful heir under the entail, some such contingency as this might happen: Plantagenet might die childless, and then Errol might claim as his heir-at-law on the affirmation that he, and not Robert, had been really Sir Robert's elder son. To guard against this an act was prepared on Plantagenet's petition, and in it, at Robert's request, a clause was inserted, entitling the former to a certain positive interest in the estate for his own and his wife's life, the said interest representing exactly one-third of the existing income.

This arrangement, Mrs. Frankalmoign having vanished permanently to Mentone, enabled Plantagenet to marry Ida, though not to live *en prince*, a *rôle* for which he had now but small preference, and which she for his sake was willing to forego. They settled down quietly at Putney, a locality selected in order to enable the big Benedick to pursue his original avocation of amateur oarsman.

Lady Marmyon, as a widow on a not very extensive income, retired to Brighton. She became the center of one of those *crême de la crême* sets whose pride happens to be in excess of their intelligence. Mr. Orphrey visits her occasionally, but she has latterly shown a decided preference for the Roman communion; antiquity, in her ladyship's eyes, being preferable to—shall I call it?—orthodoxy, and the older Church commanding especial reverence as being associated in this country with such splendid historic families as the Howards, Talbots, Cliffords, Stonors, *et id genus omne*. She is very happy in her own way, and never alludes to her late husband, with whom latterly she had no affinity whatsoever.

Errol, in plain English, sponges on his mother. He and his elder brother being practically strangers, and his own pecuniary position being equivocal in the extreme—Moseson only consenting to hold his hand in consideration of a *douceur* of £10,000: every penny that remained of the loan—he finds it necessary to plunder where he can, and his mother's is the only available *sac* he has to pillage. She has made him her heir, so that in time he will be a poor patrician instead of a patrician pauper.

Messrs. Flaymar, Conolly, and Frayney, shortly after the explosion, deemed it advisable to breath the freer atmosphere of the United States. Errol suspected the gang and put the police on their trail—with no result, as has been already stated. It was the information conveyed to them by an Irish confederate in the Force, that they might be shortly wanted, which caused their immediate emigration, and happily they have not yet returned to infest our harmless island, or to regenerate our depraved race by a baptism of nitro-glycerine.

Horace St. Vincent fell on his legs. By dint of menaces he extracted a cool hundred out of Mr. Hubble, and on that rather slender basis betook himself to Saratoga Springs as an English noble-

man. His manners being quite up to that level, and his acquaintance with society justifying his *rôle*, he positively married dollars, and of course still passes in Manhattan as "my lord," England being too warm for his temperament. His quondam confederate, the promoting Dolopy, after the manner of his kind, alternates between a flush of ready money and extreme indigence. About once in every three years he avails himself of the Bankruptcy Court, and his animal spirits are always at the highest after a good whitewash. It is his rooted conviction that he will attain a Vanderbiltian eminence within the next few weeks, and on that illusion his soul pastures, as a donkey on prospective turnips which no amount of running will bring an inch nearer his nose.

And now to touch briefly on the after-career of Robert, the heir no longer, but Sir Robert Marmyon, of Marmyon Court.

When he actually found himself master of the lands on which he had worked for wage, he sat down quietly and reckoned up his obligations. They were as follows:

First, to Polly Williams. He must make her his wife, settle upon her and her possible offspring all that was needful, and further provide for her kith and kin. That, of course, *de rigueur*.

Secondly, he owed something to Plantagenet. This debt he paid, and in the form already described.

Thirdly, he felt it right to offer Lady Marmyon the use of the Court for her life, an offer which was rather coldly declined.

Fourthly, he opined, and in this he was supported by Polly, that he ought in some measure to provide for Belinda Hodge. She had been, nominally, his sister, and perhaps his friend. Inasmuch as he had mentally resolved to convert the public-house from a poison-shop into a wholesome club for the village, he was compelled to make her an offer to resign her position as Hebe. The offer he did make must have been liberal, for it was accepted gladly and thankfully.

Fifthly, for Widow Gipps he was eager and anxious to find a comfortable and luxurious home, but his philanthropic ambition was rendered unnecessary, the poor widow being suddenly provided even better quarters in that larger and longer home where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.

Lastly, there was the parish, *i.e.*, the people. A year ago, if he had inherited then, and with the ideas he then held as articles of belief, he would have simply cut up the estate into so many portions, and divided them equally among the laboring-men. Experience, practical and religious, had toned down that idea, while it had elevated his own appreciation of the responsibility of ownership. But, while he had ceased to be a Communist, he was none the less a Liberal of Liberals. Every cottage on the estate was enlarged and improved with such additions as piggeries and cow-sheds. Then at a nominal rent he apportioned to each man twelve clear acres of good land, grass or arable, according to preference, for his own tillage after hours. He followed, in short, the outlines of Mr. Stubbs's scheme—but he went further. He gave every one of the men a fair start, either with stock or seeds, or manures and straw. Thus in twelve months he had turned Marmyon village from one of the saddest to the very happiest and most prosperous in the shire. The

farmers growled at first; they must have their little growl; the more so because the new squire objected to laborers being turned adrift at the caprice of their employers, and insisted on an honest workman retaining his employ so long as he did his duty. But the friction wore off by degrees, and when the farmers found out that well-fed, prosperous laborers make the best workmen, they ceased to grumble and began to praise.

Then, having married his wife, and settled the affairs of Marmyon, the young and earnest thinker reverted to the project which had been the ambition of his more serious and solemn moments. Father L'Isle at his request came to Marmyon once again, and he consulted that conscientious priest as to his future.

"You owe a duty to your flock here," said the father.

"That is so," replied the young man, "but it is paid. The parish is contented. There is no more poverty, nor shall there ever be so long as I'm master. No more workhouse for poor, weary souls, who have labored all their lives on a pittance, to be handled thus cruelly at the last! I have already extricated half a dozen Marmyon folk from that home of bondage, and they are among us again, freed and rejoicing. In brief, my work here is completed. It was, in the main, simply organization; and with a very little supervision on my part the machine will work automatically."

"And you still crave for higher, holier, more arduous labor?"

"As a matter of obligation. I have vowed my vows, and to break them would involve perfidy."

"You mean rather that you have formed certain resolves on a sick-bed, with the angel of death hard by. Well, friend, and if it be so that those resolutions are as strong in health as they were in sickness, that is all the more to your honor, and it fills me with hope that you may have a vocation. But—pardon—it is easy to say go; hard to go."

"I don't understand."

"Simply this. If you wish to become a priest you must study long and deeply. Hitherto, although I grant you have thought much, you have read little. Now, for a man of action and energy to commence late in life, a course of severe mental discipline involves an amount of perseverance which would rightly appall even the most resolute disposition. Are you equal to it?"

"You may try me."

"Of course. But, then, there is your wife. She, I am sure, would wish to live at the Court and play Lady Bountiful."

"My wife, Father L'Isle, has a strong element of common-sense in her composition. She knows that she is no lady, just as I know that I am no gentleman. We both in this place occupy a false position. My son, if I have one, may be fitted by education to act the baronet. I am not, neither do I care for the part. The men here won't treat me as an equal, albeit I have told them that I wish it. As for the gentry, they meet me with an air of condescending patronage. Now, I don't want to be toadied; and I don't want to be patronized. My object in life is, I hope, a higher one. Am I right?"

"Yes," replied Father L'Isle, "you are."

"And therefore—"

"You will have to place yourself under a friend of mine—a priest

—for a course of study which may last over three, four, or more years. Then we shall find work for your hand to do; for God knows that in this misnamed Christian land the harvest is plenteous."

That is all. With Robert, his hand once more on the plow, though not the plow of the old days, when he drew his Saturday night's wage from Farmer Rodd, we leave Marmyon Court and Marmyon village. Our tale is a tale that is told, a tale of faith and unfaith, truth and falsehood, riches and poverty, honesty and duplicity, frivolity and serious purpose, Toryism and Socialism, heart and heartlessness. These are now, as they have ever been, and will ever be, in little Marmyon or the large world, whatsoever king shall reign, be he Plantagenet or be he Hodge.

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